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Gaza-Israel hostilities flare up with rocket attacks, air strikes

Violence up before Ramadan, Independence Day, Eurovision



GAZA: A picture taken from the Gaza Strip shows smoke billowing following an airstrike by Israel in response to rockets fired by Palestinian militants. A barrage of around 50 rockets was fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip yesterday and dozens were intercepted by air defenses. — AFP

GAZA: Gaza militants fired dozens of rockets into Israel yesterday, drawing a wave of Israeli air strikes that killed one Palestinian gunman, as hostilities flared across the border for a second day. The escalation began on Friday, when two Israeli soldiers were wounded by Gaza gunfire near the border. A retaliatory Israeli air strike killed two militants from the Islamist Hamas group that governs Gaza. Two other Palestinians protesting near the frontier were also killed by Israeli forces. Yesterday, Israel hit Gaza with air strikes and tank fire after Palestinian militants fired about 150 rockets toward Israeli cities and villages.

The Israeli military said its forces had carried out attacks against more than 30 targets belonging to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group. A small armed pro-Hamas group in Gaza, The Protectors of Al-Aqsa, said one of its men was killed in an air strike yesterday. The Gaza Health Ministry said six Palestinians were wounded. Residents identified two of them as militants. The Palestinian Education Ministry said it was evacuating schools in areas under Israeli bombardment.

Across the border, rocket sirens sent Israelis running to shelters, and the Magen David Adom ambulance service said one woman was seriously wounded by

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Amir congratulates citizens, residents on Holy Ramadan



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated the Kuwaiti citizens and residents on the advent of the Holy Month of Ramadan the Amiri Diwan said yesterday. His Highness the Amir, along with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah family will hold a reception for Ramadan well-wishers from the army, National Guard (KNG), Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) and diplomats on the first two days of the Holy Month at Bayan Palace, the Amiri Diwan added. The Amiri Diwan noted that His Highness the Amir expressed his regret for not receiving citizen and resident well-wishers this year. The Amiri Diwan extended wishes of prosperity for the leadership and people of Kuwait, wishing many happy returns of this joyous occasion. — KUNA

News in brief

90 infected by HIV syringe

KARACHI: At least 90 people, including 65 children, are believed to have been infected with the HIV virus in Pakistan by a doctor using a contaminated syringe, officials said Friday. "We have arrested a doctor after receiving complaints from the health authorities," said Kamran Nawaz, the local police chief heading the case in the southern city of Larkana. "We are told that the doctor also has HIV," he said. Authorities were first alerted last week after 18 children from a town on the outskirts of the city tested positive for the virus, which causes AIDS, prompting health officials to carry out wider screenings. Dozens more infections were found. "More than 90 people have tested HIV positive and the number of children is around 65," Dr Abdul Rehaman, a district health official in Larkana said. — AFP

Ebola epidemic kills 1,008

KINSHASA: More than 1,000 people have now died of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo, authorities said, as aid workers warned that the highly contagious virus combined with insecurity in the restive region was creating a "deeply worrying situation". The current outbreak is the second deadliest on record, after an epidemic killed more than 11,300 people in West Africa in 2014-2016. Efforts to roll back the outbreak of the haemorrhagic fever have been hampered by fighting but also by resistance within communities to preventative measures, care facilities and safe burials. "In total, there have been 1,008 deaths," the health ministry said. The central African country declared a 10th outbreak of Ebola in 40 years last August centered in the city of Beni in North Kivu province before the virus spread into the neighboring Ituri region.— AFP

Rouhani's brother jailed

DUBAI: An Iranian court has sentenced President Hassan Rouhani's brother to an unspecified jail term, state news agency IRNA reported yesterday, in a corruption case the president's supporters allege is politically motivated. "This person (Hossein Fereydoun) was found not guilty on some charges, while he was sentenced to prison on other accusations," IRNA quoted judiciary official Hamidreza Hosseini as saying. Hosseini said he was unable to give details as the sentence could still be appealed, the agency said. The trial of Fereydoun, along with six co-defendants, began in February without the judiciary giving details of the charges. He had initially been held in 2017 before being released on bail. — Reuters

Boeing plane skids into Florida river

MIAMI: A Boeing 737 skidded off a runway into a river after crash-landing during a lightning storm in Florida on Friday, officials said, with terrified passengers all safely evacuated to shore from the stricken jet's wings. The plane carrying 143 people including crew from Guantanamo Bay in Cuba slammed into shallow water next to a naval air station in Jacksonville after a hard landing that saw the plane bounce and swerve down the runway, passengers said.

No fatalities or critical injuries were reported. "As we went down ... the plane bounced and screeched and bounced more and lifted to the right and then it lifted to the left," Cheryl Bormann, a defense attorney who was on board the flight, told CNN. "And then it sort of swerved and then it came to a complete crash stop." Some oxygen masks deployed and overhead lockers flew open during the landing, she added.

Twenty-one adults were taken to local hospitals, but none were critically injured, Jacksonville sheriff's office said on Twitter. Others were treated for minor injuries at the scene. Captain Michael Connor, commanding officer at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, told a news conference early yesterday it was a "miracle" no more serious injuries or fatalities had occurred.

"We could be talking about a different story this evening, so I think there's a lot to say about, you know, the professionalism of the folks that helped the passengers off the airplane ... it very well could be worse," he said. All 136 passengers and seven aircrew on board had been accounted for, NAS Jacksonville

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FLORIDA: This image released by the US Navy shows a Boeing 737 aircraft carrying 136 passengers and seven crew members after it skid into the St Johns River during landing. — AFP

Thailand crowns king in ornate ceremonies

BANGKOK: To the boom of cannons, pipes and chants, King Maha Vajiralongkorn was crowned yesterday in a ceremony governed by centuries-old rituals, vowing a righteous reign and calling for "national security" and "happiness" in a remarkable display of royal power. Starting at the auspicious time of 10:09 am, the public was granted a rare window into the cloistered halls of Thai royalty as the three-day coronation began.

King Vajiralongkorn is the tenth monarch of the Chakri dynasty, which has reigned over the kingdom since 1782. He ascended the throne over two years ago following the death of his beloved father. Yesterday's somber ceremony opened with the white-gowned king receiving sacred water and dabbing it gently across his face at a shrine inside the Grand Palace complex. A cannon salute marked the moment as pipes played and Buddhist monks chanted.

Several grey-haired Hindu Brahmins were also in attendance at a ceremony that symbolizes Rama X's transformation from human to divine figure. He later took his seat under the umbrella of state and was handed the Great Crown of Victory, a 7.3-kilogram tiered gold headpiece topped by a diamond from India.

Draped in bejeweled royal regalia summoning images of another era, in contrast with consumer-mad Bangkok outside palace walls, Vajiralongkorn vowed to reign "with righteousness" for the benefit of Thais. In a later audience with royal family members and some of the most powerful people in the country, including junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha, he implored all to work for "the people's benefit with prosperity, national security, peacefulness and happiness of people as our highest goal".

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BANGKOK: Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn sits on a royal palanquin following his coronation ceremony at the Grand Palace in Bangkok. — AFP

Lost world: Report shows Nature at death's door

PARIS: A landmark UN report on the state of Nature, obtained by AFP, makes for grim reading, showing how humanity has wreaked havoc with the environment. The 1,800-page draft document, set to be finalized after a biodiversity summit in Paris this week, depicts a planet ravaged by rampant overconsumption and drowning in pollution, where hundreds of thousands of species risk extinction. Here is a rundown of the report's key findings, which read like a charge sheet against history's most destructive creatures: ourselves.

Earth's population has doubled in 50 years. Not only are we living longer than ever before, we are also consuming more. Today, humans extract around 60 billion tons of resources from Nature each year-a rise of 80 percent in just a few decades. And we are leaving our mark in other ways. Since 1980, manmade greenhouse gas emissions have doubled, adding at least 0.7C to global temperatures.

We dump up to 400 million tons of heavy metals, toxic sludge and other waste into oceans and rivers each year. The report, compiled from more than 15,000 academic papers and research publications, estimates that 75 percent of land, 40 percent of oceans and 50 percent of rivers "manifest severe impacts of degradation" from human activity.

The document, the first of its kind in 15 years, paints a picture of rife inequality, with richer nations consuming vastly more per capita than poorer ones battling to retain their natural resources. Indeed, per capita demand for materials is four times more in high- than in low-income economies. In Europe and North America, humans now consume several times the recommended intake of meat, sugar and fat for optimal health, while

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LONDON: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Lord Mayor of London Peter K Estlin. — KUNA photos


Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with British Secretary of Defense Penny Mordaunt.


Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with British Minister of Cabinet Office David Lidington.

Kuwait's First Deputy Premier discusses UK's possible input in development plan

Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad delivers letter from Amir to British Premier

LONDON: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday discussed the possibility of UK contributions to His Highness the Amir's 'New Kuwait 2035' development plan. Britain's involvement in the "research and implementation phase" was the topic of talks with Secretary of State for International Development Rory Stewart, according to Kuwait's Embassy in London.

The First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser delivered a detailed briefing on the strategy, aimed at transforming Kuwait into a lucrative financial and trade destination. The talks took into consideration the UK's position, being "home to leading global economic expertise and its distinguished role in development." The two sides also discussed Kuwait's proposed northern economic trade zone and the possibility of benefiting from Britain's long-standing expertise in the management of global financial hubs, like Hong Kong and Gibraltar.

UK ready to help realize 'New Kuwait 2035'

British experience

Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad had also held talks with Lord Mayor of the City of London Peter K Estlin and representatives of British major economic institutions and corporations on Thursday. His visit to the financial district of London (the City) falls in the framework of Kuwait's effort to realize the vision of His Highness the Amir, dubbed as the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, according to a press release by Kuwait Embassy.

Sheikh Nasser Sabah highlighted the need to draw on the British experience in developing the financial services, and the promotion of development in such areas as education, energy, healthcare, technology, security, defense, ICT, economy and digital economy. In the meantime, Lord Mayor Estlin stated readiness of the city to share experience with the Kuwaiti side and help realize the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, particularly the implementation of northern economic zone project. The British side are ready to contribute to the study and implementation of the key infrastructure projects and the management of the financial market as well as the projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the statement added.

Amir's letter

Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad delivered on Thursday a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to British Prime Minister Theresa May. British Minister of Cabinet Office David Lidington received the letter, which focused on bilateral relations, on behalf of Premier May.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad held talks in London with British Secretary of Defense Penny Mordaunt. The talks tackled efforts to buttress bilateral ties and regional issues of common concern. The meeting was attended by Kuwait's Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and several other fellow ministry officials.

Furthermore, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad visited the Tower of London to see the Crown Jewels. Sheikh Nasser examined the Crown Jewels which constituted an important part of Britain's history spanning over 800 years, and included regalia and vestments worn by British kings and queens at their coronations. The Crown Jewels are masterpieces which reflected the culture of every era, thus depicting a chain of historic events about the British throne. — KUNA


First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Britain's Secretary of State for International Development Rory Stewart.

Amir's Representative attends Camlica Mosque opening

ISTANBUL: The Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, visited Camlica Mosque to take part in its inauguration on Friday. Upon his arrival at the mosque in Istanbul, the representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah performed Friday prayers alongside worshippers. Following the ceremony, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a speech on the occasion. Later yesterday, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad met Turkish President Erdogan, as he conveyed to him the greetings and best wishes of His Highness the Amir. Erdogan, in turn, echoed these sentiments in remarks to His Highness the Amir's representative. — KUNA


ISTANBUL: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. — KUNA


His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends the inauguration of the Camlica Mosque in Istanbul.

Kuwait condoles Luxembourg on Grand Duke Jean's demise

BRUSSELS: Kuwait's ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO Jasem Al Budaiwi met high-ranking officials of the royal family and the government in Luxembourg yesterday and conveyed Kuwait's condoleces on the demise of Grand Duke Jean who died on April 23rd, aged 98. "On behalf of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and on behalf of the government and the people of the State of Kuwait I conveyed our sincere condolences on the demise of Grand Duke Jean," Budaiwi said. "His legacy of perseverance, bravery and honor will not be forgotten. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends and the people of Luxembourg. May his soul rest in peace," he added. A state funeral took place yesterday at the Notre Dame cathedral in Luxembourg. Grand Duke Jean abdicated in favor of his eldest son the current Grand Duke Henri in October 2000. He had been on the throne for nearly 36 years at the time of his abdication.

In the meantime, Budaiwi met the Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel in Luxembourg after the state funeral of former head of state Grand Duke Jean. He conveyed to the Prime Minister the condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the government and the people of Kuwait. "The Prime Minister appreciated the kind gesture of Kuwait to participate in the ceremony," Budaiwi said. Bettel recalled and expressed his great happiness over the meeting with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait at the EU-Arab League Summit in Egypt last February. "He described the meeting at Sharm Al-Sheikh as excellent and reiterated the acceptance of an invitation given to him by His Highness the Amir and said he is looking forward to visiting Kuwait very soon," added Budaiwi. — KUNA

MP says Twitter account hacked to prevent releasing 'shocking' info

Education Ministry collected KD 6.6 million in fines from contractors

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: MP Abdullah Al-Kandari announced that his Twitter account was hacked, causing its sudden suspension. Kandari added that he had been expecting this after his assertions in the media concerning the interference of foreign parties in the case of a jailed Russian woman who was convicted by a Kuwaiti court of misappropriating public funds in the 'Port Fund' case. "These actions are only attempts to silence me at this particular time so as not to complicate things more for those involved in the case," he underlined, noting that he will never keep silent or give up the case. Further, Kandari said that he has a "big, shocking surprise" for those involved in the case and promised to announce it soon with new documents.

KD 6.6 million

The Ministry of Education (MoE) collected KD 6.6 million in fines and penal clauses imposed on contractors who failed to respect the terms in the contracts they had signed with the ministry in the period of 2015-2018. In this regard, informed sources said MoE had confiscated the guarantees deposited by some companies, adding that the fines collected in 2015 totaled KD 1.8 million, KD 2.2 million in 2016, KD 452,000 in 2017 and KD 1.2 million in 2018.

Municipality fees

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Fahd Al-Sholah stressed that the fees collected by Kuwait Municipality have not been raised. Responding to inquiries by MPs Mohammed Al-Dallal and Abdulwahab Al-Babtain, Sholah said the municipality will soon propose adjusting them and stressed that proposals to increase municipal service fees are subject to studies, which initially suggested increasing them by 50 percent with the aim of increasing municipal revenues and diversifying them.

Rent allowance

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare formed a special committee to scrutinize all rent allowance transactions to check their legality and validity. The committee, formed by Minister Jenan Bushehri on requests by lawmakers, will examine all transactions to find whether any are fake, especially since the total value of rent allowance paid over the past two years was KD 464 million. In a different issue, informed sources said the authority had approved a request made by the contractor building vertical housing units in Jaber Al-Ahmad City to cut the total number of buildings from 128 to 104. The sources explained that the change came in response to objections made by residents of nearby houses on grounds that their houses will be exposed to the high-rises.

Policeman insulted

An Egyptian man was arrested for insulting a policeman on duty at a hotel checkpoint, said security sources, noting that the suspect allegedly shouted threats at the policeman. Further investigations are still in progress.


MP Abdullah Al-Kandari

Search for man who threw trash off causeway

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) announced filing a case against a person who posted online video footage of himself while throwing garbage off the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Causeway. EPA added that the police had been notified to follow up the case, identify the culprit and bring him to justice. Notably, the fine for this action varies between KD 5,000-50,000 and 1-3 years in prison.

Obesity surgeries' database

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah announced using a special electronic database for obesity surgeries for the first time in Kuwait and the Middle East, noting that special equipment had been provided to register these surgeries in various Ministry of Health hospitals on the cloud database with the aim of keeping a record of the surgeries and the percentage of their success.

Speaking during a meeting with the head of the Kuwait Association Surgeons Dr Salman Al-Sabah and other officials, Sheikh Basel stressed that the ministry is keen on providing the latest medical services and equipment. Dr Salman said the project was subjected to a full four-year study before implementing it to keep track of obesity surgeries conducted in Kuwait. He warned that according to WHO statistics, the obesity rate in Kuwait is 38 percent, stressing that this calls for changing children's eating habits.


KUWAIT: A view of an education ministry warehouse in Subhan where a fire was reported.


Heavy damage inside a Fahaheel garage left by a fire.

Body found near Sharq

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Relations and Security Information Department said that a missing person whose picture was published on social media was found dead, noting that he drowned near Sharq. Police responded to a call and forensics arrived at the scene, and the body was recovered. The victim's father was called in and he identified him.

String of fires

Firemen put out a fire in the warehouse of the education ministry's supplies department in Subhan. A call was made about a fire in the electric equipment store, prompting Subhan, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Ardiya and backup stations to respond and put out the blaze. Investigations are being made to determine the cause of the fire. Meanwhile, Fahaheel and Mangaf firemen battled a blaze reported in a Fahaheel garage. The fire was in an area that had paints and three cars. Firemen contained the flames and prevented them from spreading to other areas.

AUB organizes Ramadan Quran competition


Abdullah Al-Shuaib

KUWAIT: As part of its social program for the holy month of Ramadan, Ahli United Bank (AUB) organizes its annual competition for memorizing the Holy Quran. This year, there are six categories in the competition. Two categories for male and female employees where they are to be tested in memorizing Surat As-Saff, a category for employees' children (5-14 years) where they are to be tested in memorizing Surat Al-Fajr and a category for employees' children (14-18 years) where they are to be tested in memorizing Surat Noah. The competition will also include a general category for (5-12 years) children who they will be tested in memorizing Juz 29 and a general category for (13-18 years) youth who will be tested in memorizing Juz 27 of the Holy Quran. The bank designated valuable prizes for the winners.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al-Shuaib; Head of Shariah Internal Audit Department at Ahli United Bank said in a press release: "This competition comes in a view of Ahli United Bank concern to encourage Muslim employees, their children and Muslims in general to recite and memorize the Holy Quran, and understand its numerous noble meanings," emphasizing that the best time for memorization and recitation of the Holy Quran is the holy month of Ramadan which fills hearts of the believers with love and tranquility through worship and obedience and purifies their souls.

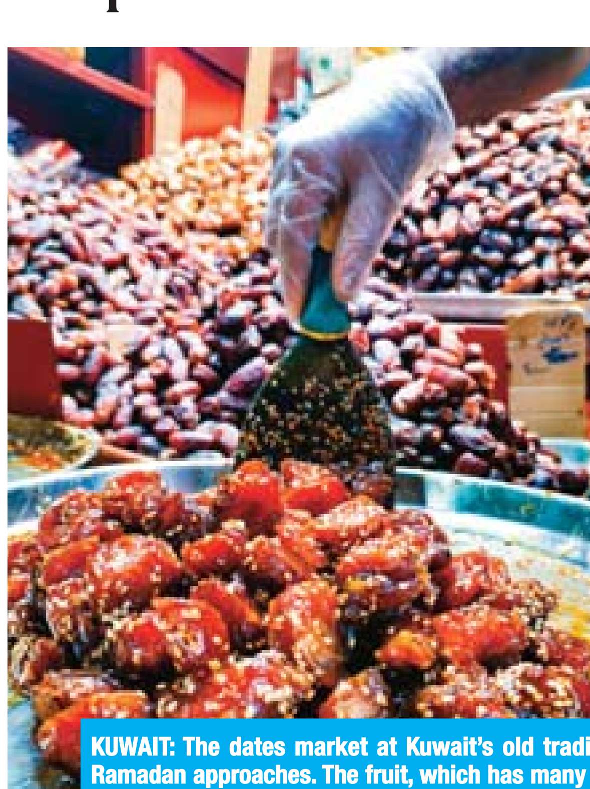
Shuaib added: "At Ahli United Bank, we are always keen to get our employees and their families involved in such fruitful religious and social activities in Ramadan every year. Moreover, all children and youth in Kuwait can participate in this competition which foster the spirit of competition in the memorization and recitation of the Holy Quran in these blessed days." Shuaib said that these programs which Ahli United Bank organizes regularly in the Holy month of Ramadan are in line with the bank's Social mission and its commitment to support various beneficial activities which contribute to educating and raising awareness of all useful issues at religious and social levels.





KUWAIT: The firefighting department at Kuwait Fire Service Directorate organized a mock exercise. The scenario was about several fires - the first in a multi-storey building, the second in a tanker with highly-combustible material, the third in a bakery and the fourth in a car involved in a collision. Capital fire center dealt with the incidents. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

People flock to dates market before Ramadan





KUWAIT: The dates market at Kuwait's old traditional Souq Al-Mubarakiya gets busy as the holy month of Ramadan approaches. The fruit, which has many tasty varieties throughout the Gulf region, is a crucial opener for the break of fast at sunset, following in the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).— KUNA

local spotlight

Demographic imbalance



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The problem of the imbalance in Kuwait's population structure and the increase in expatriate labor has become the talk of people in recent years, which requires solutions within a comprehensive vision that achieves balance and justice between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. The population of Kuwait is about 4.5 million and the proportion of citizens is 30 percent, which is around 1.4 million, compared to Arab expats (approximately 28 percent), Asians (40 percent) and other foreign nationalities.

It is well known that the development process in Kuwait has resulted in an expansion of the volume of demand for labor. The small size of the Kuwaiti population and a lack of national labor led to facilitating the recruitment and employment of expatriate labor to meet the requirements of the expansion of economic activities and for the establishment and operation of infrastructure projects. The acceleration of growth has had a significant impact on the increase in the number of expatriates at rates that exceeded citizens, resulting in the disruption of the structure of the population and the labor market.

It is no secret that the main reason for the imbalance in Kuwait's population structure is the huge number of marginal laborers due to the existence of a group of phantom companies that are bringing in redundant labor for the purpose of profit in the so-called residency trade. I believe that it is important to establish a firm and clear policy of workers in the state to identify the actual needs that are required of foreign labor, and the development of regulations and laws governing the affairs of expatriate workers and monitoring their status.

I also believe that all institutions and companies that bring more labor than their actual needs should submit periodic reports to the executive and legislative authorities to examine and evaluate the conditions of employment. It is not difficult to regulate the growth of the population, both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti, in order to improve the population structure for the benefit of all and improve the labor force in the public and private sectors, as well as improving the quality and productivity of expatriate workers.

This will preserve Kuwait's reputation in the international community as a human rights defender and its commitment to international charters.

Kuwait has been negatively affected in international forums concerned with human rights because of residency merchants and the sponsorship system, which resulted in the existence of huge numbers of marginal laborers in Kuwait. The issue also became a means for the interference of some states in the internal affairs of Kuwait on the pretext of protecting the rights of their citizens.

I think there are solutions to this dilemma related to policies, by stabilizing the size of the expatriate population by a specific rate of all nationalities and reducing marginal expatriate labor. Also, regulations and laws should be set to regulate the work of expatriates in the country to ensure their rights, as well as the rights of the sponsors. Application of international standards on security, housing and health insurance may lead to the creation of a balance.

An important feature of Kuwait's population is the high number of young people and youth. The number of Kuwaitis aged 0 to 34 represents 70 percent of the total Kuwaiti population, while the number of non-Kuwaiti expatriates in this age group is 52 percent in the country. The high percentage of young people among Kuwaitis is a test for the country over the development strategies for education and controlling the pace of employment and the parameters of the labor market.

These demographic shifts in Kuwait over a period of more than seven decades require systematic treatments to rationalize the population growth in the country. It is important to have a serious intention and willingness to implement actual policies - the responsibility is shared between the government and the parliament.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Sunset's colors paint a beautiful scenery over the Arabian Gulf road's seafronts. — Photo by Nawaf Al-Hmoud (KUNA)

Talyaa launches new app, seeks to 'revolutionize' mobility in Kuwait

Kuwait supports private sector in developing economy: CEO

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Talyaa, the transportation network company, held a press conference to announce the launch of its application yesterday at Eissa Al-Yousifi Hall in Bneid Al-Gar. Sulaiman Al-Ahmad, CEO and Founder of Talyaa, said: "Kuwait has witnessed in recent years developments in economic growth, which was a distinctive attraction for foreign investment. Kuwait supported the role of private companies in developing the Kuwaiti economy and contributing to the development plan (New Kuwait 2035 vision): that's where Talyaa (one world...one dream) started."

He added: "Our mission is to revolutionize the world of mobility and transform people's lives for the better. With one click, you can request a car, specify how to pay and see our exclusive promotions." He noted that Talyaa aspires to advance developments in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, and has received a wide welcome from China's Baidu for its mapping services.

Ahmad pointed out that the company has a strategy for the next three years to bring the first batch of 1,500 electric-powered cars by contracting with Tesla, out of a total of 5,000 environmentally-friendly vehicles to help maintain public health. "In addition, a three-phase plan was developed till 2025 to introduce the flying taxi service to make Kuwait the first in presenting this technological masterpiece that will contribute to facilitating life and reducing traffic congestions," he said. Ahmad revealed that Talyaa will coordinate with concerned authorities from next year to operate the sea taxi service and have stations on all shores of Kuwait.

Executive Manager of Talyaa Mahmoud Samir said: "The company offers its customers several services such as free Internet, additional air conditioning, wireless chargers, cold water and juice and smart screens. Because there are many complaints about theft or people forgetting things, we have installed in-car surveillance cameras that facilitate driver access and protect the rights of our customers. Also, to provide safety, an additional sensor has been installed to remind the passenger to fasten the seatbelt in the backseat."

Talyaa provides the fastest routes using the latest integrated traffic monitored technology to ensure always reaching under the expected time. In June 2018, the project started operating. Talyaa will be launched in other Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan.



KUWAIT: Officials attend a press conference to announce launching the new Talyaa application. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Visiting doctors conduct 11 surgeries at Jahra Hospital

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of Fertility Medicine at Jahra Hospital Dr Hazim Al-Rumaih said the visit of Dr Majid Shubair from Guy's and St Thomas Hospital in London to Jahra Hospital's fertility unit was highly successful. He said 11 microscopic surgeries he conducted were all successful, including some complicated cases, in addition to 30 difficult male sterility consultation cases to set a treatment plan for them. He also gave five lectures on the latest developments in treating male sterility, as he spent five days at the Jahra test tube baby unit. Rumaih said the visiting doctor gave details of his experience in the field of male sterility. Rumaih said the test tube baby unit at Jahra Hospital is keen on bringing top international expertise in the field to boost skills of local doctors and exchange experience and information about the latest developments in this field.





CBK launches special Ramadan social program

KUWAIT: Out of keenness to promote its social and charity activities for the holy month of Ramadan, the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) started its special program with a visit to patients at Al-Razi Hospital. Commenting on the program, assistant general manager for corporal communication affairs Amani Al-Wer' said that CBK has been preparing special social, humanitarian and charity programs for the holy month of Ramadan to emphasize its commitment to communicating with all sects of the society. Wer' added that CBK launched the program by visiting patients and wishing them speedy recovery, noting that the visit brought many smiles to patients' faces. Meanwhile, Al-Razi Hospital's Manager Dr Mona Abdul Samad, the medical staff and patients' families thanked CBK for the visit.







Israel only obstacle for Mideast free of nuclear weapons, WMD: Kuwait

Kuwait says nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's credibility tarnished

NEW YORK: Kuwait said Friday Israel was the only obstacle establishing a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and nuclear weapons because it failed to join Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). "Israel's membership in NPT is key to realize universality of the treaty, especially that it is the only non-member party in the Middle East, and the obstacle facing establishment of an area free of nuclear weapons and WMD," Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations, said. He was speaking before the third Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference at the UN. He said membership of non-nuclear countries in NPT reflected their conviction in danger of nuclear weapons.

NPT should be universal, he said, thus all countries which did not join it should do so. He said the 2010 NPT Review Conference agreed to hold a conference to establish a nuclear-free Middle East in 2012, but lack of "political will and seriousness by the parties assigned to organize the conference as well as Israel, contributed to failure of conference and resulted in its postponement indefinitely." Jarallah said clearing Middle East from WMD and nuclear weapons, as well as placing nuclear facilities under supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) aimed at realizing security and safety for the region. He called on countries who were preparing for the 2012 conference to organize the conference before the 2020 Review. He said the UN General Assembly approved a resolution by the Arab Group to hold the conference before end of this year.



NEW YORK: Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah addresses the third Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference. — KUNA photos



Ibrahim Faisal Al-Daei, the Kuwaiti UN mission's Second Secretary, speaks at the third Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

Tarnished credibility

Despite a deep conviction in the importance of the global nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, Kuwait believes its credibility has become questionable. The absence of true commitment from nuclear nations to rid themselves of their weapons has damaged the treaty, slowed down its mechanisms and caused its most recent review talks to fail, said Kuwait's representative. The remarks were made by the Kuwaiti UN mission's Second Secretary at the same conference, which was held at the United Nations headquarters.

The possession and development of nuclear weapons does not ensure regional and global peace and security and increases instability, Ibrahim Faisal Al-Daei told nations gathered at the talks. The complete and ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons is the sole guarantee that humanity would be spared their dangers, he underlined. Therefore, these nations should discard nuclear weapon-based defense strategies, through halting the development of their nuclear arsenals or developing alternatives. It is crucial that the humanitarian dimensions and catastrophes that are left behind by these weapons are taken into consideration, he argued. "Reaching a binding document on the non-use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states is a goal we aspire to, until these weapons are totally eliminated," the Kuwaiti diplomat said. Daei also called for nations under threat to be offered "unconditional and legally-binding contractual security guarantees." — KUNA

Kuwait assesses French universities for state scholarships


PARIS: Members of the Kuwaiti academic evaluation body pose for a group picture with Kuwait's ambassador. — KUNA

PARIS: A Kuwaiti state academic evaluation body is visiting France to determine the appropriate higher education establishments and programs intended for Kuwaiti scholarships in the upcoming fiscal year. The national academic evaluation and education quality control body is currently conducting its final assessment for France and other countries, including the UK, its director said. Hamad Al-Adwani was speaking to the press at the Kuwait Cultural Office in Paris after having met leading French education ministry and higher education evaluation council officials. During his stay, Adwani also made visits to several universities and colleges in the country. —KUNA

Kuwait delivers aid to Yemen ahead of Ramadan



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday handed out food aid to Hadhramaut Governorate of the Republic of Yemen, which included Seiyun, Tarim, Al-Qat, As Sawm and Sah districts to ease the suffering on families, and marking the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. Director-General of the KRCS Abdulrahman Al-Oun said that this project targets 1,033 families with a total of 7,231 displaced and needy beneficiaries from the Yemeni people in cooperation with the Humanitarian Response Network (HRN). Oun expressed gratitude to all donors and Kuwaiti efforts that contributed in alleviating the suffer of Yemeni people, praising the efforts of HRN in delivering the aid with the cooperation of KRCS volunteers. He pointed out the importance of activating all relief, institutional and individual efforts to help Yemeni people and shed light on the humanitarian situation by providing the necessary humanitarian needs. — KUNA







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US targets Iran uranium but lets nuclear deal stay alive

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Puzzle of piecing together victims at Sri Lanka morgue

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PURI, India: This aerial handout photograph released yesterday shows storm damage near the railway station in this city in India's eastern Odisha state. — AFP

Cyclone hits Bangladesh after battering India

Fani weakens to 'depression' • At least 17 people killed

DHAKA/BHUBANESWAR: The strongest cyclone to hit India in five years killed at least 12 people in eastern Odisha state before swinging north-eastwards into Bangladesh yesterday where five more people died and more than a million were moved to safety. Tropical cyclone Fani, which made landfall early on Friday, lost some of its power and was downgraded to a 'depression' by the India Meteorological Department yesterday as the storm hovered over Bangladesh.

"The fear of a major disaster is mostly over as (Fani) has weakened," Shamsuddin Ahmed, director of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, told reporters. A storm surge still breached embankments to submerge dozens of villages on Bangladesh's low-lying coast, a disaster ministry official in Dhaka said. The storm also destroyed several houses in the Noakhali district, where a two-year-old child and a 12-year-old girl were killed and about 30 people were injured, local official Tanmoy Das told Reuters.

In all at least five people had been killed, 63 injured, and more than the 1,000 houses had been damaged, Bangladeshi authorities said. In India, authorities were assessing damage left behind by Fani, which had spent days building power over the northern reaches of the Bay of Bengal before tearing into Odisha. Indian media reported that at least 12 people had died across the state, with most deaths caused by falling trees, but a mass evacuation before the tropical cyclone made landfall averted a greater loss of life.

The seaside temple town of Puri, which lay directly in the path of Fani, suffered extensive damage as winds gusting up to 200 kph tore off tin roofs, snapped power lines, and uprooted trees on Friday. "Destruction is unimaginable... Puri is devastated," Odisha's Special Relief Commissioner Bishnupada Sethi told Reuters, adding that 116 people were reported injured across the state. Video footage taken from an Indian navy aircraft showed extensive flooding in areas around Puri, with wide swathes of land submerged in the aftermath of the storm.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said the electricity infrastructure in Puri and parts of an adjoining district had been completely devastated. "We have the challenge of having to set up the entire electrification afresh," he told reporters. At least six people died in Bhubaneswar, Odisha's state capital, where fallen trees blocked roads and electricity supply was hit. Ashok Patnaik, director of Capital Hospital, one of the largest state-run hospitals in Bhubaneswar, said it had received four dead bodies on Friday and two on Saturday. "All are cyclone related," he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is in the midst of a general election, said in a tweet that he would visit Odisha on Monday.

Mass evacuation

The cyclone season in the Bay of Bengal can last from April to December, and some storms can be deadly. In 1999, a super-cyclone battered the coast of Odisha for 30 hours, killing 10,000 people. Since then, technological advances have helped weather forecasters track the cyclones more accurately, giving authorities more time to prepare, and a mass evacuation of nearly a million people saved thousands of lives in 2013.

This time, as cyclone Fani approached, Odisha moved 1.2 million people to safety in 24 hours, which Patnaik described as "one of the biggest human evacuations in history". Shelters were set up in schools and other safe buildings to accommodate the evacuees, who included scores of tourists. More than 100,000 government officials, 45,000 volunteers, and 2,000 civil society groups were mobilized, and 9,000 shelters and 7,000 kitchens pressed into service, Patnaik said. "Instead of it being a tragedy of humongous proportions, we are in the process of restoring critical infrastructure," he said.

Neighbouring West Bengal state escaped substantial damage, but authorities moved nearly 42,000 people to safer locations. "Electricity has been restored in most places. In the next two days, the situation will be normal," West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said in a statement. About 1.2 million people living in the most vulnerable districts in Bangladesh had also been moved to some 4,000 shelters. — Reuters

North Korea fires 'projectiles' into sea: Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea launched several unidentified projectiles into the sea yesterday, the South Korean military said, in what could be Pyongyang's first short-range missile launch for more than a year as it seeks to up pressure on Washington with nuclear talks deadlocked. The United States and North Korea have been at loggerheads since the collapse of a summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump in February, when the two sides clashed over sanctions and the extent of Pyongyang's concessions on its atomic arsenal.

North Korea "fired a number of short-range projectiles" from Hodo peninsula near the east coast town of Wonsan in a northeast direction from 9:06 am (0006 GMT) to 09:27 am, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. The projectiles travelled from 70 to 200 km towards the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, the JCS added. In an earlier statement, it had said Pyongyang had launched an unidentified short-range missile. The last North Korean missile launch was in Nov 2017.

The latest firing comes just a day after South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said Pyongyang should show "visible, concrete and substantial" denuclearization action if it wants sanctions relief. That issue was also at the center of the February talks in Hanoi, where North Korea demanded immediate sanctions relief, but the two sides disagreed on what Pyongyang should give up in return. Earlier this week, North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui warned Washington of an "unwanted outcome" if it did not adjust its stance on economic sanctions.

Yesterday's launch "does not violate Kim Jong Un's self-imposed missile-testing moratorium", which "only applied to intercontinental-range ballistic missiles", said North Korea analyst Ankit Panda. The South's presidential Blue House said it was monitoring the situation and "closely sharing information with the United States". It later said the North's launch yesterday was against a military agreement signed by the two Koreas in Pyongyang last year, and this leaves Seoul "greatly concerned".

"We call for North Korea's active participation in making efforts for the prompt resuming of dialogue," it said in a statement. The White House said it was "aware of North Korea's actions tonight". "We will continue to monitor as necessary," Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement. — AFP



SEOUL: South Korean Buddhists carry lanterns during the Lotus Lantern Festival celebrating Buddha's upcoming birthday at Jogyesa Temple yesterday. — AFP

Rangers find three-eyed snake in Humpty Doo

SYDNEY: A three-eyed snake found slithering down a road in the northern Australian town of Humpty Doo has sparked amusement in a country already accustomed to unusual wildlife. Rangers dubbed the unusual serpent "Monty Python" after finding it on a highway in late March. X-rays showed all three of its eyes were functioning and the extra socket likely developed naturally while the snake was an embryo, the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission said in a Facebook post, noting that such deformities were common among reptiles.



DARWIN: This handout picture taken on March 27, 2019 shows a three-eyed snake after a ranger found it on the Arnhem highway near the town of Humpty Doo. —AFP

Wildlife officers told the Northern Territory News the 40 cm carpet python was about three months old and died after about a month in captivity. "It's remarkable it was able to survive so long in the wild with its deformity and he was struggling to feed before he died last week," ranger Ray Chatto told the newspaper on Friday. But the late Monty Python found a new life on the Internet after the Wildlife Commission posted photos of it on their Facebook page this week. "I tried to come up with a few jokes, but they just got cornea and cornea," wrote one user. Another thought the joke was elsewhere: "Not even disturbed by the three eyed snake... just incredibly amused that there's a place called Humpty Doo." — AFP


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US targets Iran uranium but lets nuclear deal stay alive

Move to halt Tehran's ballistic missile program and curb its power

WASHINGTON: The United States acted on Friday to force Iran to stop producing low-enriched uranium and expanding its only nuclear power plant, intensifying a campaign aimed at halting Tehran's ballistic missile program and curbing its regional power. At the same time, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo renewed waivers of US sanctions allowing Russia, China and European countries to pursue cooperation programs designed to prevent Iran from reactivating a defunct nuclear weapons program.

But, the State Department said, the renewable waivers would be granted only for 90 days, a shorter period than previously. The moves are part of the Trump administration's efforts to impose international political and economic isolation on Tehran that began with the US withdrawal in May 2018 from the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated with Iran by the United States and other world powers.

It was the third punitive action taken against Iran in as many weeks. Last week, it said it would grant no more sanctions waivers for countries buying Iranian oil, accelerating its plan to push Iran's oil exports to zero. The Trump administration also took the unprecedented step of designating Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization.

The US actions announced on Friday included an end to a sanctions waiver that allowed Iran to evade a 300-kg limit on the amount of low-enriched uranium it can store under the nuclear deal at its main nuclear facility of Natanz. The move, State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement, is aimed at forcing Iran to end its production of low-enriched uranium, a demand that Iran has repeatedly rejected. "Iran must stop all proliferation-sensitive activities, including uranium enrichment, and we will not accept actions that support the continuation of such enrichment," said Ortagus.

Until now, Iran was allowed to ship low-enriched uranium produced at Natanz to Russia before it hit the 300-kg limit, said David Albright of Institute for Science and International Security. Beginning yesterday, Ortagus said, the United States also could use sanctions to block any assistance to Iran to expand the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, the only such facility in the country.

The plant currently has one working Russian-built reactor, which began operations in 2011, and Iran plans to expand the facility. Moscow signed a deal with Tehran in 2014 to build up to eight more reactors in the country. Ortagus said that the United States would no longer waive sanctions that allowed Iran to ship to Oman for storage heavy water produced at its Arak facility beyond a 300-tonne limit set in the 2015 nuclear deal. Heavy water can be employed in reactors to produce plutonium, a fuel used in nuclear warheads.

Cooperation programs allowed

The renewed sanctions waivers will permit Russia, China, and European countries to continue cooperation programs allowed by the nuclear deal that are designed to ensure that Tehran does not revive its nuclear weapons program. US intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say that Iran ended a clandestine program to develop a missile-borne nuclear warhead in 2003. Iran denies that it ever pursued such a program.

Under the waivers, China and Britain can continue designing and building a new reactor core for Arak that would make it difficult to produce plutonium. Russia would be able to continue providing uranium fuel for Bushehr's single reactor. The State Department said that a sanctions waiver also was granted to allow the modification of infrastructure at the once-secret Fordow uranium enrichment plant "to help ensure that the facility is no longer used for uranium enrichment".

It was not clear from the statement if the waiver applied to Russia's work with Iran to develop at Fordow the capability to produce non-radioactive isotopes. France would be permitted to continue a civilian nuclear safety training program. "We reserve the right to revoke or modify our policy covering these nonproliferation activities at any time if Iran violates its nuclear obligations or commitments or we conclude that such projects no longer provide value in constraining Iranian nuclear activities," Ortagus said. —Reuters

News in brief

Rouhani urges unity

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday called for the country to "resist and unite" against US pressure in what he called a "war on hope" waged against the Islamic republic. It is almost a year since President Donald Trump reimposed crippling US sanctions after exiting a landmark nuclear agreement between major powers and Iran. "America will only let go of this game when it realizes it cannot achieve anything. We have no way but to resist and unite," Rouhani said in a televised speech. "Our war today is the war on hope. They want to break our hope, and we have to break their hope" of defeating Iran, said Rouhani. "They want to cut our foreign currency supply ... they seek to sow discord in the country. They want us to be divided, to stand against each other," he added. —AFP

Rare protests in eSwatini

MANZINI, eSwatini: In a rare show of defiance thousands of people have demonstrated to demand political reforms in the tiny kingdom of eSwatini where political parties have been banned since 1973. Around 3,000 protesters, many sporting red T-shirts, took to the streets of Manzini, the second largest city, marching amid a heavy police presence on Friday. Political parties and pro-democracy groups have been outlawed for nearly five decades in the kingdom previously known as Swaziland. One of the protest organizers, Wandile Dludlu, of the Swaziland United Democratic Front (SUDF), said the strong turnout showed that the political situation in the country had reached a crisis point. Ruling by decree, King Mswati III is the only absolute monarch on the continent and one of the few remaining in the world. —AFP

Pentagon may move F-35 work

WASHINGTON: US Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan warned Friday that the Pentagon will halt manufacturing support for the F-35 in Turkey if Ankara buys a Russian missile defense system. Shanahan told journalists the government remained steadfast in its opposition to Turkey's adoption of the S-400 anti-aircraft technology. Shanahan noted that he had met with delegations from US aerospace manufacturers Lockheed Martin and United Technologies to discuss options if Turkey refuses to forego the S-400. As a member of NATO, Turkey is taking part in the production of the fighter jet for use by members of the treaty, and has plans to buy 100 of the jets itself. A number of Turkish manufacturers are making parts and equipment for the F-35, including internally carried Stand-off Missiles, airframe assemblies and wiring, leaving the NATO program partially dependent on them. —AFP

Damascus accuses Kurds of 'treason'

DAMASCUS: The Syrian government has accused Kurdish leaders of "treason" for organizing a conference with allied Arab tribes to plot out the political future of territory under their alliance's control. The state SANA news agency quoted a foreign ministry source as accusing organizers of the conference in the alliance-held but mainly Arab town of Ain Issa of "treason". It claimed that the meeting in a town "held by armed militia dependent on the United States and some European countries" had ended in "failure" as a result of a "boycott by most of the tribes". "Such gatherings are clear embodiments of the treason of their organizers, whatever their political, ethnic or racial allegiances," the source added. —AFP

Syria govt, Russia press onslaught, rebels repel attack

BEIRUT: Syrian government forces and their Russian allies pounded the rebel-held northwest with fresh air strikes yesterday, the fifth day of a widening campaign that has killed dozens of people and forced thousands to flee, sources in the area and a war monitor said. The upsurge in violence in Idlib and nearby areas has strained a Russian-Turkish agreement struck last September that staved off a government offensive into the last major foothold of the rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad.

A rebel spokesman told Reuters government attempts to advance into the Qalaat al-Madiq area had been repelled. Rebels were shelling government positions, added Naji Mustafa of the Turkey-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) rebel grouping. Syrian state media has said government forces are attacking jihadists. State news agency SANA said the army had destroyed jihadist positions in southern Idlib and nearby Hama province yesterday in response to what it called repeated violations of a de-escalation agreement.

But the UN regional humanitarian coordinator has said schools, health facilities and residential areas have been hit and the government forces are employing the worst barrel bombing in at least 15 months. Barrel bombs are containers packed with explosives dropped from helicopters.

Escalation

After an overnight lull, the bombardment escalated again yesterday, said Ahmad Al-Dbis, safety and security manager for the US-based Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM), which supports medical facilities in the area. "Now the bombing has returned and is much heavier and has spread very widely in Jabal Al-Zawiya and rural northern Hama. The planes are not stopping at all and the bombing is continuing in a very big way like yesterday and worse," he told Reuters from northern Syria.

The Syrian Civil Defense, a rescue service operating in rebel-held areas, said it had recorded more than 30 deaths in the last few days. Dbis said the number of dead was at least 50 while the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which reports on the war, said at least 67 people had been killed. Hundreds of vehicles have been arriving every day in the town of Atmeh at the Turkish border, ferrying people away from the targeted areas, an Atmeh resident contacted by Reuters said.

Mustafa Al-Haj Yousef, the Civil Defense director for Idlib, said more than 130,000 people had fled towards more secure areas, adding: "Civil Defense centers have been targeted directly." UOSSM says four medical facilities have been bombed. Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week he did not rule out Syrian forces, backed by Russian air power, launching a full-scale assault on militants in Idlib province, but that such an operation was impractical for now.

Russia's deal with Turkey, which backs the anti-Assad opposition, demanded the creation of a demilitarized zone free of all heavy weapons and jihadists. But Moscow says the agreement has not been implemented. The most powerful faction in the northwest is Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist movement that emerged from the Nusra Front, formerly Al-Qaeda's official Syrian affiliate. Its influence has grown as it has snuffed out rival groups. But other factions operating under the NLF umbrella still have a presence. Mustafa, their spokesman, said Damascus was well aware the rebels were well armed and capable of repelling any assault: "The regime will not be able to advance." —Reuters



BASAMIS, Syria: Smoke billows following bombardment by regime forces on this village in Idlib province yesterday. —AFP

Guaido makes new bid to rally military support

CARACAS: Opposition leader Juan Guaido was to make a fresh bid yesterday to rally Venezuela's armed forces behind him with protests at military bases in the crisis-hit country. The protest call by Guaido - the head of the National Assembly legislature, who is recognized as interim president by more than 50 countries - comes just days after he urged the military to rise up against the socialist president, Nicolas Maduro.

"Peacefully, civically... we are going to deliver a simple document, a proclamation to the Armed Forces to listen to the Venezuelan call, that a rapid transition is possible to produce free elections," Guaido told a press conference in Caracas. A small group of military personnel heeded Guaido's call to rise up on Tuesday, but the effort petered out, triggering two days of protests against the government in which four people were killed and several hundred injured.

Venezuela's military leadership has since reiterated its support for the government, and Maduro is standing his ground. The country's attorney general Tarek William Saab said Friday that 18 arrest warrants had been issued for "civilian and military conspirators" following the failed uprising, with lieutenant colonels among the uniformed personnel being sought. Tensions in Venezuela have soared since Guaido, the 35-year-old head of the National Assembly, invoked the constitution to declare himself acting president on January 23, claiming Maduro's re-election last year was illegitimate.

The standoff has drawn in major world powers, with the US throwing its support behind Guaido and Russia and China backing Maduro. The United States has imposed tough sanctions and Trump has refused to take the threat of military action off the table, in an intensifying campaign to drive Maduro out. But President Donald Trump adopted a strikingly conciliatory tone after a more than hour-long conversation with Vladimir Putin on the Venezuela crisis, describing the Friday talks with his Russian counterpart as "very positive."

'People are starving'

"He is not looking at all to get involved in Venezuela other than he'd like to see something positive happen for Venezuela," Trump said of Putin. "And I feel the same way. We want to get some humanitarian aid. Right now people are starving." Venezuela has suffered five years of recession marked by shortages of basic necessities as well as failing public services, including water, electricity and transport.

Trump's tone came in stark contrast to that of his top advisors, in particular Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who charged this week that Maduro had been poised to flee to Cuba, but was talked out of it by the Russians. US-Russian tensions have spiked over the months-long standoff in Venezuela, and the Kremlin's assessment of the Trump-Putin call differed substantially from that coming from the White House.

"Interference in internal affairs, attempts to change the leadership in Caracas through force, undermine the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict," said a Russian statement. "Vladimir Putin stated that only the Venezuelan people have the right to decide the future of their country," it added. The United States is insisting Maduro's days are numbered, but experts say its options for breaking the stalemate are limited, and that Washington may have overestimated the opposition leader's strength. —AFP



CARACAS: Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido speaks accompanied by lawmakers of the parliament during a press conference at the New Time Party headquarters in Los Palos Grandes neighborhood on Friday. —AFP

Egypt uncovers Old Kingdom burial ground

CAIRO: Egypt's antiquities ministry yesterday unveiled a 4,500-year-old burial ground near the Giza pyramids containing colorful wooden coffins and limestone statues dating back to the Old Kingdom. The site on the southeastern side of Giza plateau contains tombs and burial shafts from various periods, but the oldest is a limestone family tomb from the fifth dynasty (around 2500 BC), the ministry said. An AFP photographer who was allowed to access the burial shaft saw inscriptions on the walls, intricately painted wooden sarcophagi and sculptures of animals and humans.

The ministry said the tomb was that of two people: Behnui-Ka, who had seven titles including the Priest and the Judge, and Nwi, also known as Chief of the Great State and "purifier" of the pharoah Khafre. Khafre, known to the Ancient Greeks as Chephren, built the second of the three famous Pyramids of Giza. "Many artifacts were discovered in the tomb," the ministry said, icluding limestone statues of one of the tomb's owners, his wife and son.

Ashraf Mohi, Director General of Giza Plateau, said the cemetery was re-used extensively during the Late Period, starting from the early seventh century BC. The ministry also displayed what it said were Late Period wooden coffins with hieroglyphics inscribed on their lids, along with wooden and clay funerary masks. —AFP





GIZA, Egypt: (Left) Excavation workers work inside a burial shaft at the Giza pyramid plateau on the southwestern outskirts of the Egyptian capital Cairo yesterday following the discovery of several Old Kingdom tombs and burial shafts. (Right) Artifacts that were discovered are displayed. —AFP

The macabre puzzle of piecing together victims at Lanka morgue

Fragments somber reflection of brutal force of bomb attacks

COLOMBO: The nauseating smell of death that infested the streets around Colombo's morgue after Sri Lanka's devastating Easter attacks has finally dispersed. But forensic pathologists are still attempting to identify the remains of bodies blown apart by suicide bombers, the final pieces of a macabre puzzle. While staff have so far returned 115 victims to their relatives, there are still some 50 bags filled with unidentified remains in the morgue's refrigerated rooms.

The fragments are a somber reflection of the brutal force of the bomb attacks claimed by the Islamic State. It also helps explain why the death toll from the blasts has fluctuated considerably. At first Sri Lankan authorities said 359 had died before slashing it to 253, and then raising it again to 257 this week. In one bag "there are two parts of a cheek - one cheek with an ear, one with some scalp and an ear. That could be two people," said Ajith Tennakoon, the head of the Institute of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology. "The proper management of dead bodies is to identify them and to give them respect and dignity."

He said the staff's "prime duty" is to hand back the bodies to relatives so they can say goodbye to their loved ones in accordance with different religious beliefs. During the meticulous reconstruction, even the smallest clue is helpful: A piece of jewelry worn by the victim, a patterned piece of clothing or a distinctive scar. Where possible, forensic pathologists examined teeth and fingerprints but DNA tests are the most reliable method of identification. Among the last body bags could be the remains of six people still missing since the bombings, as well as the suicide bombers. They could also include victims whose remains have been returned incomplete.

Solving a crime

The forensic doctors are also investigators. They may be able to find clues that identify the attackers or the types of explosives used. From a drawer, Tennakoon pulls out a see-through plastic bag which holds a lead ball - one of those used by militants as shrapnel to maximize the damage. "We also have to help to solve the crime, it is a crime, a man-made disaster," he added. The work of piecing together bodies is more painstaking in Colombo than the other affected cities of Negombo and Batticaloa because of the nature of the bomb attacks.

"If the bomb takes place in a concrete-built structure, the damage is much worse," said Anil Jasinghe, Sri Lanka's director general of health services. "That is what happened in the hotels, they were concrete buildings." Although 102 people died in one church in Negombo, almost all the bodies were returned the same evening. The blast blew the roof off the building, allowing the air pressure to escape through the top.

But in a confined space, a sudden rush of air causes considerable devastation. "What counts more than anything are the shock waves, they move faster than sound and at very high velocity, which actually could tear bodies apart," said Jasinghe. As forensic pathologists continue to puzzle over the fragments still lying in body bags, victims' relatives who had gathered outside the building in temporary marquees - where they had the distressing task of identifying their loved ones through photographs - have long since left and the tents taken down. —AFP



COLOMBO: In this photo taken April 22, 2019, relatives of bomb blast victims gather outside a morgue, waiting to identify loved ones missing or killed in the Easter Sunday bomb attacks on churches and hotels. —AFP

Minneapolis to pay shooting victim's family $20 million

MINNEAPOLIS: Minneapolis city officials on Friday announced a $20 million settlement with the family of an Australian woman who was fatally shot by a police officer in 2017, just days after the officer was convicted of crimes associated with the killing. The settlement of a civil suit brought by the family of Justine Ruszczyk Damond, which came after two days of talks, includes $18 million for the family and $2 million to be donated to an anti-gun violence group, city officials said.

"This is not a victory for anyone, but rather a way for our city to move forward," Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said in announcing the settlement at a news conference. "And I do believe that we will move forward together, united in the belief that such a tragedy should never have occurred in our city," he said.

Damond, 40, had called police on the night of July 15, 2017 to report a possible sexual assault outside her house. When Damond approached the patrol car that responded, Officer Mohamed Noor fired a shot through a window of the car, killing her. The incident drew international criticism, including from Australia's prime minister, who called the incident "shocking".

Noor, 33, who is no longer with the force, testified at his trial that he acted in self-defense after he and his partner Matthew Harrity, who was driving, heard a loud noise. But a jury on Tuesday convicted him of third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. The prosecutor said it was the first time a police officer in Minnesota was convicted of murder. A wave of killings of black men and teens by US police in recent years has prompted street protests, but in this case Damond was white and Noor is a black Somali immigrant.

City officials said $2 million of the settlement, which the City Council unanimously approved and the mayor said he would sign off on, will go to the Fund for Safe Communities of the Minneapolis Foundation, which said on its website that it supports "community-led efforts to address gun violence." "We know that no amount of money can heal the pain of the Ruszczyk family, or any family that has lost a loved one in this way," said City Council President Lisa Bender. "It is our continued commitment to work together with our community to demand and support change to our policing." —Reuters

Blogger rips into Kremlin, one click at a time

MOSCOW: He is wheelchair-bound and has limited use of his hands but Alexander Gorbunov, the author of hugely popular social media accounts in Russia, has emerged as one of President Vladimir Putin's most vocal critics. Diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy and using his right index finger to type, the 27-year-old author of StalinGulag skewers the "hypocrisy" of Putin's system and the everyday injustices ordinary Russians face.

Known for his dry wit and generous use of profanities, StalinGulag has built a near 1.5 million strong army of followers on Twitter and Telegram, with a total media outreach believed to include several million more. For years the StalinGulag author's identity remained one of Russia's best-kept secrets but Gorbunov blew his cover after authorities began harassing his 65-year-old mother and 80-year-old father last week.

Gorbunov, an intelligent, soft-spoken man with a goatee, said he and his wife have been on tenterhooks. "They can easily arrest and put in prison anyone," Gorbunov told AFP in an interview, saying that even a short stint in jail could kill him. "They don't care." In an increasing crackdown on dissent, Putin in March signed laws that allow courts to fine and briefly jail people for showing disrespect towards the authorities and to block media for publishing "fake news".

'Damn hero'

Gorbunov, who is a successful self-taught financial trader by day, dreads publicity but this week revealed his identity to BBC and later spoke to AFP after gun-toting police inspected his parents' home in the North Caucasus city of Makhachkala. His relatives in Moscow have also been intimidated, he says. "If the authorities are afraid of what I write they are worthless," he said. Gorbunov's story has stunned Russia. "This person is a damn hero," said screenwriter Andrew Ryvkin, while author Denis Bilunov called Gorbunov "the person of the year."

In a show of solidarity, Pavel Durov, the self-exiled founder of the Telegram messenger app, verified the StalinGulag account and offered his author help in moving abroad. Gorbunov said he was heartened by the outpouring of support from Russians who have flooded him with offers of help and money. He has chalked up some 40,000 new followers over the past week. The blogger insisted he was neither a hero nor an opposition activist. He said he merely puts in writing his thoughts on everything from Russia's foreign policy blunders to the excessive lifestyle of Putin's inner circle. "What's happening in the country is terrible," Gorbunov said. "Injstice is what angers me the most."

In a 2018 post, he issued a dark warning to his readers. "Really scary times are coming," he said, urging Russians to look out for each other. "This is the reality and not everyone will get out alive." Gorbunov lives with his partner of seven years in a comfortable Moscow apartment, employs two drivers and a live-in aide and enjoys an active social life. He does not want to reveal his income but says he forks out around 400,000 rubles ($6,145) every month just to cover his rent and pay his helpers. He refuses to take any medication, saying his condition is incurable and he had no illusions about his future. "I don't want to turn my life into a silly battle," he said. "It's a battle I am going to lose."



MOSCOW: Alexander Gorbunov, also known as a top Russian opposition blogger StalinGulag, speaks during an interview on Friday. —AFP

'Not an optimist'

A lawyer by training, he works more than 10 hours a day, sometimes waking up at night if the market moves. He writes posts for his StalinGulag accounts when the mood strikes him and he needs a short break from work. He appears to take some of his inspiration from his favorite book, "Journey to the End of the Night" by French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Celine. The 1932 World War I classic filled with profanities expresses disgust with the hypocrisy of society and laments the misery of human existence.

Gorbunov is fiercely protective of his wife who sometimes holds his hand as he speaks to AFP and helps him drink from a cup. They met seven years ago but refuse to reveal details about their relationship. His story has generated huge media interest in Russia but Gorbunov hopes the buzz will soon subside. He wants to get on with his life, watch the last season of Game of Thrones and keep trading and writing his blogs. —AFP

Japan's new emperor urges world peace in first public speech

TOKYO: Emperor Naruhito urged Japan to work together for world peace as he made his first public appearance yesterday in front of a cheering, flag-waving crowd of tens of thousands. "I sincerely wish that our country, hand-in-hand with foreign countries, seeks world peace and further development," said the 59-year-old Naruhito, who ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne Wednesday. Japan's 126th emperor wore a morning coat to make the brief appearance on a glass-covered balcony of the Imperial Palace in central Tokyo, along with other adult royals including Empress Masako.

Masako donned an elegant yellow, long-sleeved dress with a matching hat and pearl necklace. Emperor and empress emeritus, Akihito and Michiko, did not join their children as they have decided to withdraw from official duties after their three-decade reign. Akihito, 85, was the first Japanese emperor to abdicate in more than two centuries. The royal family were scheduled to make a total of six appearances throughout the day, with some 50,000 people gathered before the main gate of the palace before the first one, according to national broadcaster NHK.

More elaborate festivities are planned for Oct 22 when he and Masako will appear in traditional robes for a palace ceremony before parading through the streets of Tokyo to be congratulated by a host of world leaders and royals. —AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako make their first public appearance after ascending to the throne at the Imperial Palace yesterday. —AFP

Russia's influence in Cuba stirs ghost of Cold War

HAVANA: Russia is stirring the ghosts of Cuba's Cold War past as it looks to re-establish its influence in the Communist-run island nation, although this time analysts say Moscow has no intention of bankrolling Havana. Whereas once the Soviet Union and Cuba were linked by an ideological bond, now pragmatism and a shared rejection of US foreign policy is drawing them together again. At Havana's colorful May Day parade Wednesday, Raul Castro, the first secretary of Cuba's Communist Party, received the highest distinction from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation: the Order of Lenin.

The former Cuba president said the prize - first presented in 1930 by the Soviet Union - pointed to the "historic relations" between the two countries that "have endured different scenarios and today are being reinforced and renewed". This rapprochement is not new but has been consolidated by shared opposition to sanctions imposed on Cuba by Washington, which accuses the Caribbean nation of providing military support to Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro, another Moscow ally. "The effect of this policy is that it isolates the United States on Cuba and we're opening the door for greater Chinese and Russian presence on the island," said Ric Herrero, executive director of the Cuba Study Group, which connects Cuban-Americans advocating economic and political freedom on the island. Relations between Havana and Washington had thawed under former president Barack Obama, but have chilled considerably since Donald Trump's administration took over.

'Lovers triangle'

The Soviet era may have been confined to history, but it hasn't been forgotten. "In Cuba, we've always had fond memories of Russia," said 82-year-old Luis Corredera Rodriguez as he played dominos with friends on a Havana sidewalk. "They supported us in everything." "They're friends for life," added Julio Garcia, 59, although he noted that "the Russians have changed." In effect, he said, the Cubans have become more Russian than the Russians themselves. "They're no longer Soviet, they're capitalist like everyone."

Behind the dominos table - Cuba's national pastime - a parked Russian Lada is passed by a revving classic 1950s American car. "It's almost like a lovers triangle between the US, Cuba and Russia: It's an old relationship, there's a lot of emotion here," said Scott B MacDonald, senior associate of the Americas program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He said the last two years have seen Cuba slide into "a new Cold War", although with a different dynamic this time. "At the end of the Soviet Union, it was about $4 billion a year that went to prop up the Cuban economy." —AFP



HAVANA: A man drives a Russian-made car along Havana's Malecon on April 24, 2019. —AFP

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Washington Watch

Playing 20 questions to figure out the 'deal of the century'

Dr James J Zogby
President Arab American Institute

I believe that it was Henry Kissinger who described his approach to running Arab-Israeli negotiations as creating the illusion of momentum to compensate for the lack of momentum. The goal wasn't the outcome. It was to keep everyone involved in the process. Adhering to this maxim, successive generations of US diplomats have "led" a peace process more for its own sake than for establishing a just and lasting peace.

For decades, we had, what the Palestinians would say was "all process, no peace." The Trump Administration has, it appears, now taken this approach one step further. Instead of wasting time trying to create the fiction of negotiations between an ideologically intransigent Israeli government and a weakened and dysfunctional Palestinian Authority, the Trump team promised to do the work themselves by putting together "the deal of the century."

We have been awaiting the unveiling of this "deal" for almost two years and have been told at regular intervals that it would be forthcoming "in a matter of weeks or months". As I see it, the Kushner, Greenblatt, Friedman team may have found a way to create the reductio ad absurdum of Kissinger's maxim by creating the illusion of a deal to compensate for the absence of a deal.

During the past two years, in order to keep the suspense growing as to exactly what the deal might include, there have been leaks from "official" (Arab, Israeli, and American) sources. These have, each in turn, been coyly denied by the Trump team with the cautionary note that their effort remained a work in progress and would only be revealed when it was completed and the time was right.

Since most of the leaks have suggested proposals that were wholly unacceptable to the Palestinians, the Trump team have accompanied their denials with the warning that the Palestinians should not reject the "deal" until they see it - promising that it would include proposals that would improve their lives. These notes of caution have often come in the form of tweets from Jason Greenblatt who has, it appears, taken to trolling Palestinian leaders and even low-level operatives with advice and/or rude rebukes.

And so we are left with questions galore as to what's in the deal. The guessing game, itself, has become an industry of sorts - almost like medieval theological inquiries into the nature of the divine. Articles are written, debates are held, and Twitter wars explode. In each instance, the Administration denies the guesses and chides those who guess, as the medieval church hierarchy might have done, with the injunction that we should be still and have faith, since the mystery will be revealed at the appropriate time.

I have come to see this "have faith" as nothing more than a cynical ploy to buy time. As a result, I am led to ask, "What if there is no deal of the century?" What if this entire enterprise is, as I suggested, merely "creating an illusion of a deal" in order: to keep the Palestinians quiet; hold the Arab world at bay; and the rest of us guessing. What fuels my cynicism is the fact that during this same two-year period, while the "deal" was supposedly being concocted, the Trump Administration and the Netanyahu government have been quite busy taking steps that make clear their intentions toward the Palestinians.

Trump has, in his words, taken "Jerusalem off the table" recognizing it as the capital of Israel. And by closing the US Consulate and denying US assistance to Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem, he has placed this captive Palestinian community wholly under Israeli control. Similarly, the Trump Administration has attempted to take the issue of the Palestinian refugees "off the table" by suspending all aid the UNWRA and making clear that they do not consider the descendants of those who were forced into exile in 1948 to be refugees. At the same time, by their silence, the Trump Administration has accepted Israeli unilateral actions that have predetermined the future of Palestinian lands and rights. Israeli settlements have expanded, illegal outposts have been legitimated, and Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and exploitation of Palestinian resources and lands have accelerated at an alarming rate. Add to this the Administration: suspension of all Palestinian aid; acceptance of Israel's "Jewish Nation State Law; failure to criticize Israel's refusal to reimburse Palestinian VAT revenues; support for other Israeli acts that have crippled the PA, while fostering divisions between the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza; taking action to protect Israel from the International Criminal Court; and efforts to criminalize support for BDS - all of which have contributed to furthering Palestinian powerlessness and Israel's sense of impunity.

With this in mind, I suggest that the guessing game should be over. Even if there is a "deal of the century" (and I'm still an agnostic on that question), we can be certain that it won't: end the occupation of the lands seized in the 1967 War; create true Palestinian sovereignty and control over their land and resources; give Palestinians the opportunity to freely and independently conduct commerce with the outside world; recognize the rights of Palestinian refugees; or do anything to reunite the areas now called "East Jerusalem" to Palestinian control.



Photo shows family members of Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn (from left) Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti, daughter Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana, daughter Princess Bajrakitiyabha Manidol, sister Princess Ubolratana, sister Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn attending the coronation of King Vajiralongkorn at the Grand Palace in Bangkok. —AFP

War, civil strife, modernity: Thai enduring monarchy

Coups, war, communist insurgency, violent protests, succession. Thailand's monarchy has survived major upheavals and a turbulent domestic political scene. The May 4 coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn and news days before about his new queen Suthida mark the latest chapter in the nearly 240-year-old Chakri Dynasty. Here is a brief look at key moments for Thailand's revered monarchy.

Bangkok beginnings

The ruling Chakri dynasty emerged in 1782. That year King Rama I establishes the new capital of Siam on the banks of the Chao Praya river. It was the beginnings of modern-day Bangkok. King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V, took power in 1868. Seen as a reformer, he modernized the economy and civil service, sending his children abroad for education. One of his sons, a prince, falls in love with a commoner. In December 1927, she gives birth to future ruler Bhumibol Adulyadej in Cambridge, Massachusetts. On June 24, 1932, King Prajadhipok falls in a bloodless coup. A constitutional monarchy is introduced by reformers in the government and military.

A mysterious death

In 1935, Bhumibol's older brother, Ananda Mahidol, is crowned king of Thailand after his uncle Prajadhipok abdicates. On June 9, 1946, his 18-year-old brother Bhumibol Adulyadej assumes the throne after Ananda dies in a mysterious shooting in his Grand Palace bedroom. Royalists bring back rituals and customs reinforcing the monarchy's role in Thai society. Bhumibol marries Queen Sirikit on April 28, 1950, a week before his coronation. The king and queen have four children. Their only son is Vajiralongkorn.

Communist threat and protests

Thailand was considered a key US ally in the fight against communism as it spread through Southeast Asia. In the 1960s and 1970s, the US flies bombing sorties from bases in the country. Thai troops known as the Queen's Cobras join the fight in Vietnam. Thailand fights a simmering communist insurgency at home at a time when monarchs were ousted by left-wing forces in Cambodia and Laos. In October 1973, scores are killed when a military dictatorship cracks down on pro-democracy protests. Bhumibol asks the prime minister to leave the country and later appoints a new premier, leading to a brief flowering of democracy. Three years later right-wing militias kill dozens of leftist students at Thammasat University. The same year, 1976, the penalty for breaching Thailand's royal insult law is toughened to 15 years.

Street violence

In 1992, hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters fill the streets of Bangkok demanding a return to civilian rule. Dozens are killed by the army in what is later known as "Black May". In a dramatic televised broadcast, the king admonishes the two leaders from each side at the palace and tells them to reconcile, cementing his mythic status as a unifying force. In 2006, a bloodless coup ousts billionaire and populist prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra while he is at the UN. The coup sparks years of protests in a country split between Thaksin's supporters-many of whom are in the rural north-and his foes among the Bangkok-based elite in the palace, military and bureaucracy. In August 2009, the king makes a rare speech warning that the country could collapse if feuding factions do not unite.

Rama X and Queen Suthida

Thailand's junta seizes power in 2014 and topples the administration of Thaksin's sister Yingluck after months of violent street protests. In September 2016, the palace announces the king has received treatment for a "severe" blood infection. Bhumibol dies the next month and Thailand is plunged into mourning. Thailand's junta leader announces Vajiralongkorn as successor. In early 2019, a party linked to Thaksin puts forward Vajiralongkorn's older sister as its prime ministerial candidate, a shock move in a country where the monarchy is nominally above politics. Vajiralongkorn scuttles the nomination of Princess Ubolratana, calling it "highly inappropriate". Days before Vajiralongkorn's May 4 coronation the palace announces he has married Suthida Vajiralongkorn na Ayudhya, a former flight attendant who joined his royal guard. She is invested as Queen during the first day of the ceremony. —AFP

Cabin crew, bodyguard, Thai queen: Suthida's meteoric rise

BANGKOK: Kneeling in front of her King, Suthida Vajiralongkorn na Ayudhya was invested as Queen yesterday in Bangkok's Grand Palace, taking up a prominent role in a country where the monarchy is deeply revered, a fairytale ascent for the former flight attendant. Wearing a pink traditional dress, Suthida took her seat next to King Maha Vajiralongkorn in the throne hall after he poured a few drops of sacred water on her forehead and handed over insignia according her status as queen.

The newest member of the royal family is the fourth wife of 66-year-old Vajiralongkorn, a deeply private monarch who spends a lot of his time abroad in Germany. He has a 14-year-old son from his third marriage and six other children. King Maha Vajiralongkorn's coronation yesterday came just three days after a stunning palace announcement that the pair had married bestowing Suthida with the title of Queen. But not much is known about his long-time consort-turned-queen, who faces a new and protocol-filled life in the wealthy and venerated Thai monarchy.

Broad biographical details such as her work as a flight attendant and her education at an upper-crust institution have emerged in Thai media. But the palace has so far declined requests for more information. Suthida does not have the same royal lineage as Vajiralongkorn's mother Queen Sirikit, who is the great-granddaughter of the Chakri dynasty's fifth king. She has "really come from the people", said Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, Thailand specialist at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

Harsh lese-majeste laws mean unguarded discussion about the monarchy inside the country is dangerous and can result in a prison term of up to 15 years per count. Thailand's normally effusive social media have been subdued in reaction to the royal news. Suthida's first public engagement came Thursday when the couple kneeled to pay their respects to statues of previous Chakri dynasty monarchs in Bangkok's old quarter. On Friday, she accompanied her husband to the sacred Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the heart of the Grand Palace.

Queen brings 'legitimacy'

Born on June 3, 1978, she graduated with a Communication Arts degree in 2000 from the Catholic-run Assumption University of Thailand. She then worked as a flight attendant for national carrier Thai Airways. According to a local media report she met the future king, a keen aviator with a pilot's licence, when he flew the company's aircraft during a charity event in 2007.

In November 2013, Suthida entered the royal army before becoming part of the monarch's prestigious security detail less than a year later. She was promoted to the rank of general in December 2016 two months after the death of revered former King Bhumibol Adulyadej as Vajiralongkorn took to the throne. Less than a year later, in 2017, she was made deputy commander of the king's Royal Guard, often seen shadowing the monarch at public events.—AFP



Thailand's Queen Suthida pictured during King Maha Vajiralongkorn's coronation in Bangkok. —AFP

Kim Jong Nam murder: Mystery that gripped the world

A balding man with a backpack slung over his right shoulder walks across a crowded airport concourse, stopping to look up at the departure board to find his flight to Macau. As he stands in front of an automatic check in machine, he is grabbed from behind and something is put over his face. The incident lasts just over two seconds.

The blurry CCTV footage from airport cameras makes it impossible to see exactly what is happening. But half an hour later, Kim Jong Nam will be dead, poisoned by one of the most toxic nerve agents ever invented. The assassination of Kim - the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un - gripped the world, spawning weeks of media coverage and sparking a tense diplomatic stand off. South Korea immediately pointed the finger at its isolated northern neighbour, and Malaysia, in whose main airport the killing took place, found itself under an unwelcome international spotlight.

Agonizing pain

Kim Jong Nam was used to hanging around airports, having spent a decade shuttling between different locations after falling out with his family and going to live in exile. The figure who had spoken out against the North Korean regime since leaving his homeland had been targeted with toxic nerve agent VX. He died quickly and in agonizing pain, his vital organs suffering horrendous damage as the chemical surged through his system.

The killing on February 13, 2017, was an assassination worthy of a spy thriller, capturing global headlines and featuring a cast of North Korean agents using pseudonyms, and young female migrant workers allegedly trained to be crack assassins. The Cold War-style murder was the latest bizarre story to hit Malaysia, a normally placid, Southeast Asian backwater. These ranged from the disappearance of Flight MH370 to the assassination of a Palestinian scientist in Kuala Lumpur, allegedly by Israeli operatives.

Kim, who was travelling on a North Korean passport under a different name, was rushed to the airport medical clinic and given emergency treatment following the attack, but died soon afterwards in an ambulance transporting him to hospital. The poison was so potent that Kim, who had told friends in the months leading up to the attack that he feared being killed, did not have time to take tablets that he was carrying which could have worked as an antidote. Two seemingly unlikely assassins - Siti Aisyah from Indonesia and Doan Thi Huong from Vietnam - were arrested in the days after the killing and accused of having smeared the toxic nerve agent VX on his face.

'Carefully planned, executed'

The women went on trial for murder in October, 2017. But after proceedings had run for a year and a half, prosecutors unexpectedly announced in March they were withdrawing the murder charge against Aisyah, and she flew home. They did not provide any explanation for the move but it followed intense diplomatic pressure from Indonesia. A month later, Huong agreed to accept a lesser charge of "causing injury" and she was freed Friday after more than two years behind bars. The pair had steadfastly maintained their innocence, saying they were recruited by North Koreans who fled Malaysia after the assassination, and were tricked into carrying out an attack they thought was a prank for a reality TV show.

Still, prosecutors insisted the women knew what they were doing and that the murder "was carefully planned and executed". CCTV footage seen during proceedings showed the pair running in different directions after carrying out the attack. Their arms were stretched out in front of them, and they headed to separate airport bathrooms to clean up. Huong - who was wearing a T-shirt with "LOL", which stands for "Laugh Out Loud", during the attack - and Aisyah fled the airport by taxi.

Four North Koreans, who allegedly masterminded the murder, were seen on CCTV footage in the airport before the attack, and allegedly passed the poison to the women to carry out the assassination. The men made a quick getaway following the murder, changing their clothes and heading to the airport's main terminal, where they met a North Korean embassy official and an official from national airline Air Koryo. They are then believed to have flown out of the country, heading home via convoluted routes. —AFP



Vietnamese national Doan Thi Huong arrives in Hanoi following her release from a Malaysian prison after charges that she was involved in the murder of Kim Jong Nam were withdrawn. —AFP

13 Berkshire swings to big profit; Buffett laments Kraft Heinz



14 Vodafone Qatar, Huawei reach strategic partnership to expand wireless network



14 Al-Mulla Automobiles holds test drives for Mercedes-Benz customers





KUWAIT: Hamad Al-Marzouq and Al-Enezi with Al-Qertas and Fernandez during the signing ceremony.

Zain to supply latest smart solutions to The House Hotel & The Gathering Mall project

Project to be opened by 2020 in Khairan

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, signed a partnership agreement with Al-Raghad and Al-Manar Real Estate Company to supply The House Hotel & The Gathering Mall project, to be opened by 2020 in Khairan, with the latest tech smart solutions.

The signing ceremony, held at Zain's main headquarters in Shuwaikh, witnessed the attendance of Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Zain Kuwait's Government and Large Segment Director Basima Al-Enezi, General Manager and owner of Al-Raghad and Al-Manar Real Estate Company Nezar Al-Qertas, Kerten Hospitality's representative Jorge Fernandez, as well as Business Relations officers from the two companies.

The House Hotel & The Gathering Mall project, executed by Al-Raghad and Al-Manar Real Estate Company, is a real estate project to be opened by 2020 in Khairan. The project includes a mall and an 18-floor hotel, part of The House Hotel international group. Zain will supply the project with the latest tech smart solutions as per the highest international standards to cover multiple essential needs, including internal communications systems, low-voltage network, Wi-Fi network, electrical grid solutions, and much more.

Commenting on the partnership agreement, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "Today we are excited to sign this partnership agreement with Al-Raghad and Al-Manar Real Estate Company, which surely reflects our commitment in further pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the business sector. We achieve this through empowering a smart life and an efficient business sector, as we consider ourselves an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait, especially that Zain is one of the biggest integrated digital service providers in the region".

> Hamad Al-Marzouq: Zain committed to pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the business sector

Al-Marzouq added: "Zain's digital transformation journey began in 2017 with our partnership with the Ministry of Electricity and Water through the Smart Meters project, which we are still considered a main partner in its success today. In addition, early last year 2018, we launched the all-new Zain LIFE brand, which consists of a portfolio of flexible digital services that include an array of innovative services for consumers and businesses. Today we continue enriching Zain's leadership in the Kuwaiti market and the region by signing this partnership".

Al-Marzouq concluded: "there is no doubt that our participation in this project reflects the great role played by the private sector in achieving the country's various developmental goals through empowering the business sector and the use of advanced technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Smart Cities solutions, and more. We look forward to the opening of this project by 2020, and we hope it adds a unique value to Kuwait's tourism scene".

The House Hotel & The Gathering Mall - of the Ireland-based Kerten Hospitality - will create a unique community that is vibrant with a fresh lifestyle in Khairan as an entertainment destination away from the city noise. The project will offer various experiences, including world-class designed swimming pools with exceptional services. The hotel will feature 46 suits over 18 floors specially designed for visitors with a distinct taste, as well as a unique boutique of international restaurants, entertainment halls, beauty shops, Spas, and more.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology and Zain's long experience to enable an easier and more flexible life.

Ahli United Bank achieves a net profit of KD 17.6m for Q1 2019

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank K.S.C.P has announced that its net profit for the first quarter of 2019 amounted to KD 17.6 million, compared to KD16.8 million for the same period in the previous year, with a growth of 4.3 percent.

The Bank's total operating profit amounted to KD 30.9 million, having grown by 6 percent over the total operating profit of KD 29.2 million in the same period in the previous year. Shareholders' equity rose by 4.8 percent to KD 421.8 million as at 31 March 2019 compared to KD 402.6 million for the previous period last year (adjusted for 2017 dividend distribution KD 21.9 million), while net operating profit rose by 5.4 percent to KD 21.7million as at 31 March 2019, compared to KD 20.6 million for the same period of last year.

In addition to the foregoing achievements, the Bank maintained a good capital adequacy ratio of 15.3 percent as at 31 March 2019 (compared to 16.9 percent for the same period of the previous year) which is higher than the level required by the supervision authorities, thereby increasing the opportunities of future expansion in credit facilities and operations.

Furthermore, the Bank achieved good returns on equity and assets at 16.2 percent and 1.8 percent respectively for the quarter ended on 31 March 2019, both of which are among the highest in the market, leading to the earnings per share rising from 9.5 fills in the previous year to 9.9 fills this year.

Commenting on these results, Ahli United Bank Chairman of the Board of Directors, Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, said: "These financial indicators represent a good start for our performance this year. We continue to make intensive efforts and relentlessly work to achieve more of our ambitions befitting our leadership position that we attained through years of continuous success in providing unsurpassed banking experience over many decades, being the oldest bank in Kuwait, since its opening in 1942, during which the Bank succeeded in maintaining the trust and loyalty of its customers."

In Al-Mudhaf's words: "Ahli United Bank maintained the positive valuations and ratings by international rating agencies and gained numerous prestigious awards from the world's foremost entities specialized in monitoring the performance of banks and financial institutions, is a strong indicator of the Bank's business strategy and sound performance."

Al-Mudhaf referred to the role of AUB's sustained social development program so rich with numerous activities which included a wide variety of areas that deepened Ahli United Bank's positive impact on society. Dr. Anwar Al-Mudhaf expressed thanks and appreciation for the Bank's shareholders and customers for their committed support to and deep trust in the Bank. He also thanks the Central Bank of Kuwait and all supervision authorities and lauded the efforts of the Bank's executive management and all its employees that enable the Bank to achieve that success.

AUB acting Chief Executive Officer, Tareq Muhmood, said: "All our efforts are focused on achieving more and more success during 2019, and we will double our efforts to achieve even more by adopting state-of-the-art technologies in banking services and digital transformation in order for Ahli United bank to continue to occupy a prominent position in banking development and innovation and by taking numerous substantial steps during the current year."



Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf

ALSAYER LAUNCHES STATE-OF-THE-ART FAHAHEEL CENTER

Impressive Range of Automotive After-sales Solutions Under One Roof to Enhance Customer Convenience

Multi-Level Facility in Fahaheel for Toyota Service, Genuine Parts, Acceossories, Oil, Yokohama Tire Fitment





Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons, a subsidiary of ALSAYER Holding held an opening ceremony and press conference to launch the mega Toyota Center. The center which is centrally located at the automotive services area in Fahaheel features Toyota quick lube, quick service, mechanical repairs, Yokohama tire fitment and genuine spare parts and accessories outlet.

The event was attended by ALSAYER Board of Director Mubarak Naser Al Sayer CEO, Delegate from Toyota Motor Corporation Masyuki Fukumori Field Operations Manager from Bahrain Regional Office, members of the Top Management including Bengt Schultz COO, Ibrahim Al Fouzan Business Director Toyota Group Service Division, Desmond Lew Business Director Group Spare Parts Accessories and Logistics, Krishna Kumar General Manager AlSayer Engineering Co., valued business partners along with representatives from press and media.

New Fahaheel Center - Total built up area 11500 m2

Basement floor:
- Spare parts store 183 m2
- Service center (general repair) 4817 m2.

Ground floor:
- TOP (tire center): 1000 m2
- Spare parts and accessories sales outlet: 255 m2.
- service Center (quick service): 2750 m2

Mezzanine floor:
- 2500 M2 Offices and delivery area for services customers.
- Parking area 1500 m2.

According to Mubarak Naser Al Sayer "ALSAYER could not have grown its business in Kuwait without the support from Government, society, business partners and customers. On behalf of the Chairman and Board of Directors I thank you for your patronage. Today consumers are looking for different services and products to match their individual lifestyles. So, addressing their needs is the key to our growth in every segment that we compete in. Fahaheel in Ahmadi Governorate is undergoing tremendous development. Residential projects and commercial establishments are increasing. Today, we announce the launch of our newest service center in Fahaheel, our second Service facility in this governorate. We look forward to driving positive changes in the automotive business around this area."

State-of-the-Art ALSAYER Fahaheel Center

- Energy efficient Service facility, one of the highest in capacity with 56 working bays
- Spare Parts outlet and auto accessories center with multi-level storage for 3000-line items
- One of the biggest facilities in the middle east for Yokohama tires fitment and our wide range of oil products

Service Facility – State-of-the-art facility with latest technology and equipment.
- 56 bays for minimized waiting time for customers
- Fully centralized air-conditioned facility with all shops (Quick Lube, Quick Service, Express Maintenance, General Repairs) under one roof, enabling easy shop-to-shop access for our customers.
- 200+ professional staff, ready to serve customers.
- Separate customer lounges for ladies and gents with complimentary wi-fi, cafeteria
- Steam wash machines - Better washing quality with minimum water consumption
- Aqua vehicle lifters - water and air powered vehicle lifters, without zero electricity consumption
- Oil water separator for safe discharge of waste water
- Dual oil network for both Mineral Engine oil & Synthetic engine oil.
- Concealed garage furniture design ensuring safety of both customers and staff.

Parts and Accessories outlet
- This outlet has got both spare parts as well as wide range of accessories.
- Multi-level storage at 3 levels.
- Once fully operational it will be the second largest Toyota Retail counter in Kuwait.
- 3000 lines of line items stocked

Tires Oil and Paint Section
- One of biggest facility in the middle east with Wide range of products
- Cofran and Motul designated areas
- State-of-the-art equipment workshop
- Spacious parking
- Separate ladies lounge

Speaking during the opening ceremony Bengt Schultz said "As Kuwait is growing, we intend to grow our network of showrooms and service facilities to stay close to our customers by being a part of their neighborhood. We want to make our customer feel at home when they are visiting us. We all at Alsayer, from the members of the board down to every single member of team, is focusing on one thing only – delivering an unsurpassed customer experience. As our friends from Toyota Japan says – putting a smile on every customers face."

Sustainable Solutions:

To apply the criteria for sustainability in all projects, renewable resource has been utilized inspired by ALSAYER's Motto "DO MORE WITH LESS which includes:

-- Solar panels to generate100 kilowatt.
-- Latest technology LED light fittings.
-- Auto water mixers.
-- Entire facility illuminated by LED lights, ensuring minimum energy consumption & water saving sensor taps throughout the location.
-- Advanced technology during the construction in terms of execution methods, high standards of the finishing materials

Ibrahim Al Fouzan said "Today as we inaugurate and open the doors of this facility to our customers we feel extremely proud that we have accomplished 2 business goals - Contribute to the development of automotive business in this region by offering best service solutions for our customers and adopting environment friendly business practices taking in to consideration safety of employees, customers and society."









Berkshire swings to big profit; Buffett laments Kraft Heinz

Who will succeed billionaire Warren Buffett?

OMAHA, Neb: Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc yesterday said gains in its stock investments fueled a big first-quarter profit, while improved results from its Geico auto insurer and BNSF railroad units boosted operating results. Berkshire also said it repurchased $1.7 billion of its stock in the quarter, reflecting Buffett's troubles to find better uses for the Omaha, Nebraska-based conglomerate's cash hoard, which now totals $114.2 billion.

Results were released as Buffett, 88, and Vice Chairman Charlie Munger, 95, prepared to answer more than five hours of questions from shareholders and analysts at Berkshire's annual meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, which draws tens of thousands of people.

The $21.66-billion overall profit, or $13,209 per Class A share, compared with a year-earlier net loss of $1.14 billion, or $692 per share, and a fourth-quarter net loss of $25.39 billion. These results illustrate what Buffett has called the "wild and capricious" and, in his view, meaningless swings caused by an accounting rule requiring the reporting of unrealized stock gains with earnings, regardless of Berkshire's plans to sell. Berkshire had $15.1 billion of these gains in the first quarter.

Operating profit, which Buffett considers a better performance measure, rose 5 percent to $5.56 billion, or about $3,388 per Class A share, from $5.29 billion, or $3,215 per share, a year earlier.

Analysts on average expected operating profit of about $3,399 per Class A share, according to Refinitiv data. Results excluded operating earnings tied to Berkshire's 26.7 percent stake in Kraft Heinz Co because the food company has not released its own audited quarterly results, Buffett told reporters before the annual meeting.

Buffett also maintained that "we paid too much" for Kraft Heinz, which was created in a 2015 merger between Kraft Foods and H.J. Heinz, which Berkshire and Brazil's 3G Capital controlled.

In last year's fourth quarter, Berkshire took a $3-billion writedown on Kraft.

GEICO, BNSF

Geico saw pre-tax underwriting profit rise 14 percent as rising rates and premiums offset higher accident claims. BNSF's profit rose 9 percent to $1.25 billion as higher demand from the energy and industrial sectors offset lower volumes attributed to severe winter weather and flooding. Among other businesses, the Berkshire Hathaway Energy unit posted a 3-percent profit increase, while earnings from retailing and services units increased 16 percent, despite a 19 percent revenue drop at See's Candies because Easter fell late. Berkshire owns more than 90 companies. Last month, Berkshire committed $10 billion to Occidental Petroleum Corp's cash-and-stock bid for Anadarko Petroleum Corp, which Chevron Corp also wants to buy. The Berkshire investment is contingent on Occidental completing its proposed purchase of Anadarko. Berkshire's Class A shares closed Friday at $327,765.61, and its Class B shares closed at $218.60.

Succession question

As the annual shareholder meeting of Berkshire Hathaway got underway yesterday, a key question hangs over the gathering: who will take the reins of the empire built by 88-year-old billionaire Warren Buffett?

"Warren Buffett is irreplaceable," said Macrae Sykes, a research analysts at Gabelli & Company.

But Meyer Shields, managing director at the investment firm Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, was less concerned.

"Berkshire Hathaway can certainly survive without Warren Buffett," he said. After all the conglomerate is made up of "mostly solid businesses that are only minimally impacted by their ownership." Investors are not expecting major upheaval, since Buffett has taken steps in recent years to carefully prepare for a leadership change, although he has not made the plan public. Among four likely candidates, there are two clear frontrunners: Gregory Abel, 57, and Ajit Jain, 67, who were both promoted last year to the board of directors and who are both known quantities who have been with Buffett for decades.

Leading candidates

Abel joined the company in 1992 in the energy division, and for more than a year has overseen all non-insurance activities. Jain came on board in 1986 in the insurance division, which he currently leads.

Also potentially in the running are Todd Combs, 48, and Ted Weschler, 56, chosen by Buffett and his long-time business partner, Charles Munger, 95, to handle the group's investments.

"That's never been officially disclosed, but I suspect it will be either Greg Abel or Ajit Jain... and probably the former, given his solid and growing exposure to Berkshire's non-insurance businesses," Shields said.

Sykes agreed, noting that Jain "really likes to focus on insurance businesses and... seems less interested in the spotlight." It is always possible a dark horse candidate could emerge from the company's board, which includes fellow billionaire and Microsoft founder Bill Gates. One is Tracy Britt Cool, 35, a Harvard graduate and Buffett's right-hand woman for the past 10 years.

Regardless of who the successor will be, Shields said markets should at first "respond very negatively" to Buffett's absence, in part due to his unique status.

But it is also partly because Berkshire's "exceedingly weak" disclosures "have forced investors to rely more on Mr Buffett's carefully-managed public persona than on the companies' individual or aggregated earnings potential," Shield said. Gregori Volokhine, portfolio manager at Meeschaert Financial Services, said Buffett's presence added 10 to 15 percent to the company's share price, and without him, that premium would "disappear."

- More transparency? -

In a little more than 50 years, "the Oracle of Omaha" has built a juggernaut worth more than $530 billion, with businesses that range from paint to railways to consumer products, and include energy, clothing, insurance, banking and fast food. Buffett never embraced the idea of passing the baton to his children — Susan, Howard and Peter — who are involved in many charities.

Only Howard is listed in the Berkshire Hathaway organizational chart as a member of the board of directors.

In 2011, Buffett told CBS that he wanted his son "Howie" — who has joined in night patrols in Arizona to prevent unauthorized immigrants from crossing onto American soil — to succeed him as non-executive chairman of the board of directors.

But even if the face of the company will change, its culture and investment strategy likely will remain marked by the caution that has been so central to Buffett, the world's third richest person, analysts say. —Agencies



Warren Buffett (C), CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, is surrounded by press and fans as he arrives at the 2019 annual shareholders meeting in Omaha, Nebraska yesterday.

Venezuela CB moves forex operations to cash

CARACAS: Venezuela's central bank has begun using piles of cash rather than electronic transfer to sell foreign exchange to local banks, according to five finance sector sources, a sign of how the nation's economy has become increasingly primitive amid a hyperinflationary meltdown.

Foreign banks have become increasingly unwilling to carry out Venezuela-related transactions amid a raft of US sanctions, meaning the central bank is unable to carry out such foreign exchange operations through foreign wire transfers as would happen almost anywhere in the world, the sources said.

Businesses for years bought hard currency that the central bank transferred to them via foreign bank accounts, and used the funds to import raw materials or machinery. But they cannot carry out such transactions with cash, because foreign providers rarely accept it, the sources said. Banks are not interested in helping clients get the funds into foreign accounts because doing so could jeopardize their relationships with third-party correspondent banks that are sometimes suspicious that cash-related transactions could be linked to illicit activities, the sources said.

Firms instead use the euros to pay salaries or bonuses, as inflation near 2 million percent has left employees insisting that they not be paid in the battered local bolivar currency. Some use the cash to pay dividends. Venezuela increased the use of euros rather than dollars in its foreign exchange operations following US sanctions in 2017, citing the need to reduce dependence on the US financial system.

"The best thing to do with (the euros) is to make cash payments to employees," said one of the sources, adding that companies on average buy around 20,000 euros ($22,000) at a time.

The central bank and the information ministry did not respond to requests for comment. Venezuela's banks sell a combined total of about 6 million euros per week in cash, two of the sources said.

The banks send armored cars to the central bank to pick up the cash, which is usually distributed in 20, 50 and 100 euro notes. The country's 16-year-old currency control mechanism, originally created by late socialist President Hugo Chavez, has for years sold hard currency to businesses seeking it.

But the foreign exchange auction system called Dicom has sold limited volumes in recent months, providing a mere $1.1 million over the last two weeks, according to official data.

The United States has hit Venezuela with several rounds of sanctions, including measures that block American banks from providing financing to the Venezuelan government and put restrictions on the purchase of oil by US firms.

The sanctions do not explicitly prohibit companies from engaging in routine trade with Venezuela.

But the US Treasury Department in April slapped sanctions on Venezuela's central bank as part of the Trump administration's drive to dislodge President Nicolas Maduro from power.

Companies have become increasingly worried about the potential legal risks of any transactions associated with Maduro's government. Maduro says the government is victim of an "economic war" led by political adversaries and the administration of US President Donald Trump, and accuses foreign media of exaggerating the country's problems for political ends. — Reuters

Nasdaq ends at record as stocks cheers strong US jobs growth

NEW YORK: The tech-rich Nasdaq powered to a fresh record Friday as Wall Street cheered a much better than expected US jobs report for April. European bourses also advanced following the US report, which set unemployment at a 49-year low.

"No signs of a slowdown here," said James Knightley, chief international economist at ING.

The US economy added 263,000 net new positions in April, well above the 200,000 forecast by analysts. Unemployment fell two tenths to 3.6 percent but the decline was in part because the pool of workers shrank and fewer people were looking for jobs, pulling them out of the labor force, the Labor Department reported.

Even with the positive attributes to the April jobs data, the report showed wage inflation was measured, putting little pressure on the US Federal Reserve to boost interest rates, analysts said. "Neither too hot nor too cold," said Stephen Innes, head of trading at SPI, calling the US data "another Goldilocks" payroll report. "The US economy remains in the sweet spot with extremely robust labour markets driving strong consumption growth but apparently without stoking the inflationary fires," he said. The tech-rich Nasdaq climbed 1.6 percent to 8,164.00, about two points above a record earlier in the week.

Bourses in London, Paris and Frankfurt advanced modestly. Despite the strong jobs data, FTN Financial's Chris Low pointed to a report from the Institute for Supply Management that showed slowing services sector activity. "I don't think everything is quite as rosy as the jobs numbers suggest but for now traders are happy," FTN Financial's Chris Low told AFP.

Low said investors were also cheered by news that Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway had invested in Amazon, which jumped 3.2 percent. "It's him (Buffett) signing off the on the US stock market rally," Low said. "It's not like him to make a high-profile buy at a market top." The billionaire all-star investor disclosed the move in an interview with CNBC. Buffett previously has lamented not getting into Amazon at earlier stage, blaming "stupidity" for missing the opportunity in a 2017 interview. In commodities trading on Friday, oil prices rebounded after falling hard on Thursday in the wake of a surprisingly large build in US oil inventories. Some analysts viewed the increase as a reflection of the improved demand outlook for the US following the strong jobs data. — AFP



NEW YORK: In celebration of Cinco de Mayo, a mariachi band performs on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on Friday in New York City. Stocks closed up nearly 200 points following news of a strong jobs report. — AFP

Zambia's finance minister says tax reforms needed to cut debt

LUSAKA: Zambia will pay off all outstanding legitimate VAT refunds, but plans to press ahead with a new non-refundable sales tax despite criticism from some businesses as it strives to cut debt, its finance minister said on Friday. The proposed tax change in Africa's second biggest copper producing nation has upset the mining community, which has said the country is deterring new investment it desperately needs.

In a speech in Lusaka, Finance Minister Margaret Mwanakatwe told business leaders, who are involved in extended consultations over the tax change, that the move was necessary to stop "debt escalation". She also said it would help pay outstanding refunds "and more importantly increase revenue collection to support the government's social development programs". The new sales tax was meant to have been introduced on April 1, but has been postponed until July to allow more consultation. Industry insiders have said the government owes an estimated $600 million in VAT refunds.

The International Monetary Fund has repeatedly warned Zambia is struggling with high debts and shrinking foreign currency reserves. Mwanakatwe said the government was accruing about 1.8 billion kwacha ($140 million) in VAT refunds every month.

"Why should the government go through this pain of refunds every month? Do I need to go through that pain? No. Let's bring up a simpler, more efficient system," she said. Zambia last year announced a range of tax reforms, leading some miners to warn of job losses, although some threats have failed to materialize. In January, for example, Canada's First Quantum Minerals , scrapped plans to lay off 2,500 workers in Zambia, saying it would continue dialogue with the government over the tax changes. Zambia is not alone in seeking to change the terms of engagement with its foreign investors. Neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa's biggest copper producer, and Tanzania have also increased their tax demands. The acting CEO of Zambia's mining investment arm ZCCM told Reuters at a mining conference in New York this week that he was seeking to attract investment partners and Zambia was an attractive long-term investment proposition. — Reuters

Turkmenistan airlines to resume flights to Europe

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan's national air carrier has scheduled flights to the United Kingdom and Germany again following a ban imposed by European Aviation Authorities. It was unclear yesterday if the ban dating back to February had been lifted. But flights to the English city of Birmingham and Germany's Frankfurt beginning on June 1 appeared on Turkmenistan Airlines' schedule late Friday.

Flights were not listed to Paris, another destination the airline flew to regularly. "We have no confirmation regarding Paris," a Turkmenistan Airlines spokesman said yesterday. The resumption of flights was not mentioned on the European Aviation Safety Agency's website as of Saturday and AFP could not reach EASA for comment despite multiple attempts.

Hundreds of passengers were left stranded in Britain in February after the EASA suspended Turkmenistan Airlines over safety concerns. The isolated Central Asian republic's flag carrier provides services from London and Birmingham to the Indian city of Amritsar which are popular with Britain's Punjabi community.

The UK Foreign Office said in a February travel advisory that EASA had "suspended Turkmenistan Airlines flights to and from the EU pending confirmation that it meets international air safety standards." — AFP

Vodafone Qatar, Huawei reach strategic partnership to expand wireless network

A large-scale 5G technology rollout to be part of expansion

KUWAIT: Vodafone Qatar and Huawei have entered into a strategic agreement to significantly expand and enhance Vodafone Qatar's entire wireless network infrastructure including a large-scale 5G technology rollout.

This agreement will see two industry leaders at the forefront of digital innovation come together to accelerate the digital transformation of Qatar to meet the country's economic growth targets and national agenda. The landmark agreement was signed yesterday at Vodafone Qatar's Headquarters by Vodafone Qatar's Chairman Abdulla Nasser Al-Misnad and Charles Yang, the President of Huawei Middle East. Also present were both companies senior management.

Commenting on the agreement, Vodafone Qatar's Chairman Abdulla Nasser Al-Misnad, said: "Vodafone Qatar is proud to be laying the ground for future technologies that will support Qatar and its vision to be a leader in the development of smart cities and digital economies of the world. We are delighted to further develop our partnership with Huawei, who has been the front-runner in terms of innovation related to their early role in the standardization of 5G technologies globally. The planned expansion and enhancement of our wireless network will place it in the ranks of the best in the world."

Vodafone Qatar's CEO Sheikh Hamad Abdulla Al-Thani, added: "Vodafone Qatar's wireless network to date has offered Vodafone Qatar's customers a world class service that's leading on speed, quality and availability on both data and voice. This new agreement with Huawei will further accelerate the transformation in adoption of the new generation of technology such as 5G technology and Internet of Things that will support the applications for smart cities, artificial intelligence and others."

President of Huawei Middle East, Charles Yang, said: "We are glad to see Vodafone in the first wave of 5G rollout globally. Huawei is committed to working with Vodafone to drive digital innovation, take advantage of 5G large-scale commercial rollout best results, and together build a mature 5G ecosystem that thrives on shared success and promotes social progress along the way. Early proliferation of 5G is vital to building the digital economy in Qatar. Huawei will ensure providing its end-to-end 5G solutions in Qatar, utilizing the best experiences and practices out of working in over 170 countries worldwide."



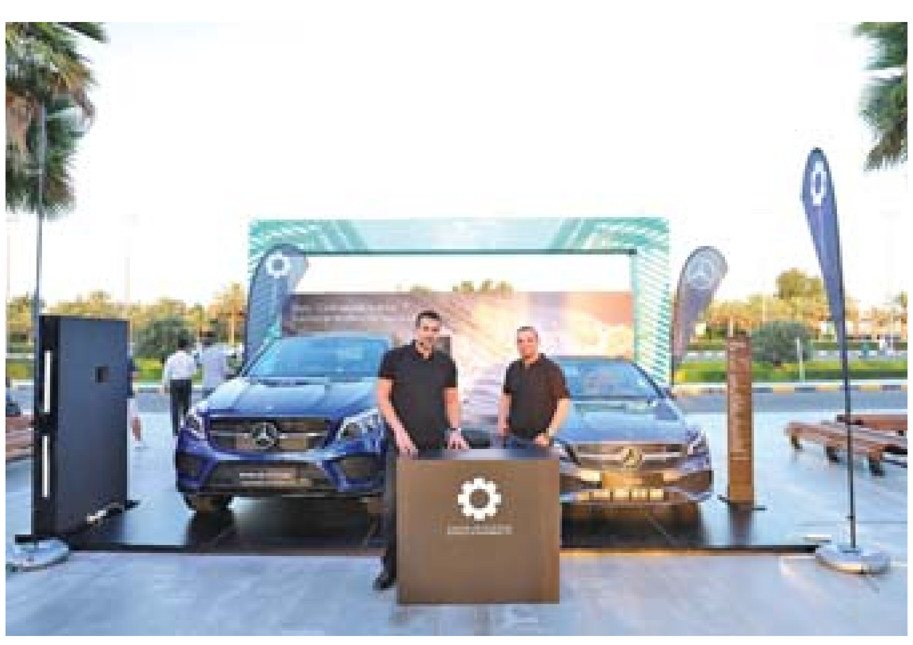
Abdulla Al-Misnad and Charles Yang (right)



DOHA: Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani (left), Abdulla Al-Misnad (second left), Charles Yang (second right) and the senior management of both companies during the signing of the agreement.

Since switching on its 5G network in August last year and receiving the spectrum license to operate 5G commercially from the Communications Regulatory Authority in January this year, Vodafone Qatar has already deployed 5G in dozens of locations across the country and marked several milestones. Last week, the company announced that it made 5G technology commercially available to its customers with the launch of - Vodafone GigaHome- the latest innovation in home internet solutions. Recently, the Company also made the first live 5G call using a 5G handset and the first live 5G holographic call in the region.

5G offers the 'real time' connectivity to power 'smart devices' of all kinds. This opens up a whole host of new capabilities in gaming, virtual reality and augmented reality applications. 5G technology will also help unlock the enormous potential of Internet of Things (IoT) that will drive economic benefit and improve livelihoods. This includes smart cities in which self-driving cars interact with traffic systems and connected homes seamlessly control temperature and energy - the benefits of 5G technology are endless.





Al-Mulla Automobiles holds test drives for Mercedes-Benz cars at Murouj Sahara

KUWAIT: Al-Mulla Automobiles Company, the authorized general distributor of Mercedes-Benz vehicles in Kuwait, recently held a test driving event at Murouj Sahara during which it reached out to the public showcasing the superior performance, luxury designs, advanced technology, and safety features that make Mercedes-Benz the ideal car to own.

During the event, Mercedes-Benz Kuwait took the opportunity to give participants a hands-on experience with the Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 Coupe and the Mercedes-Benz CLA, in addition to a selection from its extended lineup of vehicles, and assisted them in picking their next car. The test drive event provided participants with an opportunity to assess the performance of the vehicles in a safe and luxurious experience.

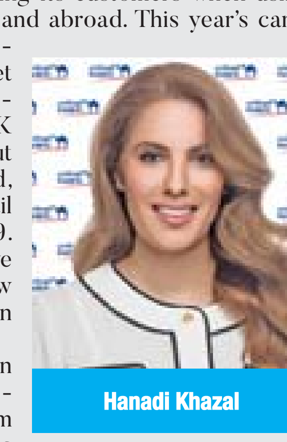
Al-Mulla Automobiles Company utilized this opportunity to showcase its exclusive offers on the Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 Coupe and the Mercedes-Benz CLA. The Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 CoupÈ from the 43 series model offers an attractive entry point into the world of AMG performance. With hallmark characteristics including the enhanced engine output by 390 hp and higher torque of the 3.0-litre V6 Biturbo engine, specific AMG suspension, Sports Direct-Steer system, the GLE 43 series facilitates an impressive driving performance.

The Mercedes-Benz CLA is the four-door premium Coupe in the mid-size segment. With this model, Mercedes-Benz is setting new standards in expressive, Avantgarde design. The CLA thrills new, more modern and younger target customers and has become a design icon. These offers are exclusive and made available through financing with Al-Mulla Finance Company.

In addition to providing customers with a selection world-class vehicles, Al-Mulla Automobiles took this opportunity to highlight the level of after-sales services presented by Mercedes-Benz Kuwait. Al-Mulla Automobiles Company provides the highest level of quality of service and maintenance by Mercedes-Benz experts using Mercedes-Benz GenuineParts to ensure the vehicles are taken care of to the highest standards. Customers that purchase a new vehicle form Al Mulla Automobiles Company receive a free three-year comprehensive warranty with unlimited mileage, with the option to extend to five years or 200,000 km whichever comes first. Owners of new Mercedes-Benz vehicles also receive a free two-year or 30,000km service package, which they can opt to extend to five years for more peace of mind.

NBK launches its summer campaign for 2019

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced the launch of its annual summer campaign for 2019, which includes rewarding its customers when using NBK Cards in Kuwait and abroad. This year's campaign includes significant opportunities to get up to 15 percent cashback when using NBK Credit Cards throughout the campaign period, starting from May 1 until September 15, 2019. Customers will also have a chance to enter a draw and win cashback on their spends for a year.



Hanadi Khazal

NBK is always keen on rewarding its customers, providing them with the best services and products, as well as striving to offer the biggest prizes and unique campaigns that are tailored to meet their interest. This year, NBK launched the biggest summer campaign across Kuwait including numerous rewards.

This year, NBK Summer Campaign 2019, provides current customers, who are holders of NBK Credit Cards, with a unique opportunity to automatically receive up to 5 percent cashback on their duty free bills, when using their NBK Credit Cards.

NBK customers may choose a different merchant category to receive the cashback as follow: 15 percent for telecom bills, 10 percent for car rentals, 10 percent for jewelry/watches, 5 percent for duty free, 5 percent for restaurants, 5 percent for airlines, 3 percent for hotels, and 3 percent for clothing stores. In addition, customers have the chance to be among the 10 winners and get cashback for a year on their purchases and up to KD 500 per month, when using their NBK Cards.

"We are launching our Summer Campaign 2019 as part of our commitment to reward our customers with cashback for their purchases. This year we added a new feature, allowing them to choose the category where they like to earn their cashback." Hanadi Khazal, Chief Marketing Officer, National Bank of Kuwait, said.

"NBK always strives to fulfill its customers' needs. Those campaigns and offers are designed to meet their aspirations, and that is why this Summer Campaign is dedicated to winning cashback and doubling the rewards offered through this year's draw." Khazal added.

Regarding the draw, for every KD 1 spent locally using NBK Credit and Prepaid Cards, during the campaign period, customers will have a chance to enter the draw. Their chances will double during the holy month of Ramadan. Also, for those traveling abroad, the rewards and the chances of winning are even higher. NBK cardholders who use their eligible debit, credit or prepaid cards outside Kuwait earn three entries for every KD 1 spent. However, during the holy month of Ramadan, those traveling abroad will double their chances and earn six entries for every KD 1 spent on their NBK cards.

To qualify, customers need to spend monthly a minimum amount of KD 200 to get a chance to win cashback or enter the final draw at the campaign's closing date. NBK Credit Cards are the perfect way to pay for your purchases, as they are designed to provide added value and a wide range of benefits including earning NBK Rewards Program, NBK Miles Points, purchase protection, extended warranty and a chance to enter NBK's various draws.

Huawei P30 Pro: A feature packed phone with a super camera

KUWAIT: Bringing together a balance of power and efficiency without compromising on design and looks has always been a challenge for smartphone makers. However, if you are on the lookout for a powerful new smartphone that not only looks good and delivers on performance, but at the same time is capable of taking some of the most stunning pictures taken on a smartphone camera, then the Huawei P30 Pro is the one. A proud member of Huawei's P30 series, the Huawei P30 Pro is packed with more than just a powerful camera. Let's take a look.

One of the finest cameras on a smartphone

Dubbed as the Supercamera Phone, the Huawei P30 Pro comes with a revolutionary Leica Quad Camera setup, the first of its kind. The Huawei P30 Pro packs in four lenses which includes a 40MP main camera with the Huawei SuperSpectrum sensor, a 20MP Ultra-Wide angle lens for horizontal and vertical shooting, an 8MP telephoto lens with SuperZoom capabilities and a Huawei Time of Flight (ToF) camera for beautiful portrait shots with rich bokeh and sophisticated depth information capture.

Innovative features in the camera setup include the SuperSpectrum lens which allows for more light to enter the camera sensors, allowing for crisp and clear photos and videos even in low light conditions, while the SuperZoom lens allows the camera to zoom up to 5x optical zoom, 10x hybrid zoom and 50x digital zoom. Thanks to the Optical Image Stabilization (OIS) and Huawei's AI Stabilization (AIS), users can enjoy blur-free images and videos, be it at low-light, extreme zooms or even while moving. Additionally, the Huawei P30 Pro also comes with Dual-View Video1, a revolutionary new way to record videos using multiple cameras for different perspectives. This mode will split the screen into two customizable views, one close-up and one wide-angle, for a more creative video creating experience.

The battery to support it all

To run such heavy hardware, the Huawei P30 Pro is packed with a massive 4,200 mAh battery, so that you don't run out of power even after an entire day of intensive use. Now just in case you do, not to worry, as the Huawei P30 Pro features the Huawei SuperCharge, which supports 40W charging, enough to bring the phone back up to 70 percent in just 30 minutes. You can also charge your phone wirelessly as the Huawei P30 Pro supports 15W Huawei Quick Charge.

As an added feature, the Huawei P30 Pro comes with the Wireless Reverse Charging technology, which lets users to use their phones as a wireless power bank to charge other wireless charging enabled devices such as wearables and earphones, or even other phones, provided they support the Qi Wireless Charging standard.



Powerful hardware under the hood

Under the hood, the Huawei P30 Pro houses some impressive hardware. At its heart lies the Kirin 980, Huawei's flagship chipset and fastest one yet. The chipset plays a key role in handling complex processes in creating a great shot. This is done thanks to smart scene detection, facial detection and tracking, image stabilization, depth perception, RAW image noise reduction and a full RGB color production, all of which contribute towards that perfect shot. Additionally, it also houses Mali-G76 as its GPU further boosted by GPU Turbo 3.0 for an improved gaming experience by enhancing gaming graphics and ensuring smoother performance by removing lag.

Huawei P30 Pro users can also enjoy 8GB of RAM for faster processing and smoother performance. Storage options include both 256GB and 512GB, giving users more space for all their photos, videos, apps and more.

A software built for everyone

The HUAWEI P30 Pro comes with a new and improved EMUI 9.1, which bridges the gap between hardware and user experience. Built on the philosophy of "Enable a Quality Life", the EMUI 9.1 syncs all the elements of the Huawei P30 Pro and provides an efficient, balanced and user-friendly experience. Inspired by timeless aesthetics and a minimalistic concept, the EMUI 9.1 is built around a design language to provide a soothing, natural experience. Additionally, the system software also uses Huawei's Extendable Read-Only File System (EROFS) for an improved operating smoothness and efficiency.



KFH launches its Ramadan program 'increase good deeds in Ramadan 5'

Al-Ruwaieh: Program confirms bank's leadership in social responsibility

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched its comprehensive Ramadan program themed "Increase Good Deeds in Ramadan 5" that is full of activities, events, visits and voluntary work as part of the Bank's endeavors to solidify its commitment towards the society, while supporting all social and humanitarian initiatives.

The program also aims at strengthening KFH's social role, while reinforcing ties with various segments of society. Executive Manager Group Public Relations and Media at KFH, Yousef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH will continue its efforts to support all activities of interest to the society in line with the bank's strategy and social responsibility message, especially in the Holy month of Ramadan.

He added in a press release, that KFH has prepared a comprehensive program in Ramadan that encompasses different activities that cover all social segments, indicating KFH will distribute over 20000 breakfast meals at different locations. KFH is collaborating with "Ramadan Aman" campaign and the Ministry of Interior to distribute 100000 meals.

KFH organizes breakfast feasts to workers on duties during Iftar time in recognition of their efforts and responsibilities. KFH is sponsoring events with Flare Fitness this Ramadan.

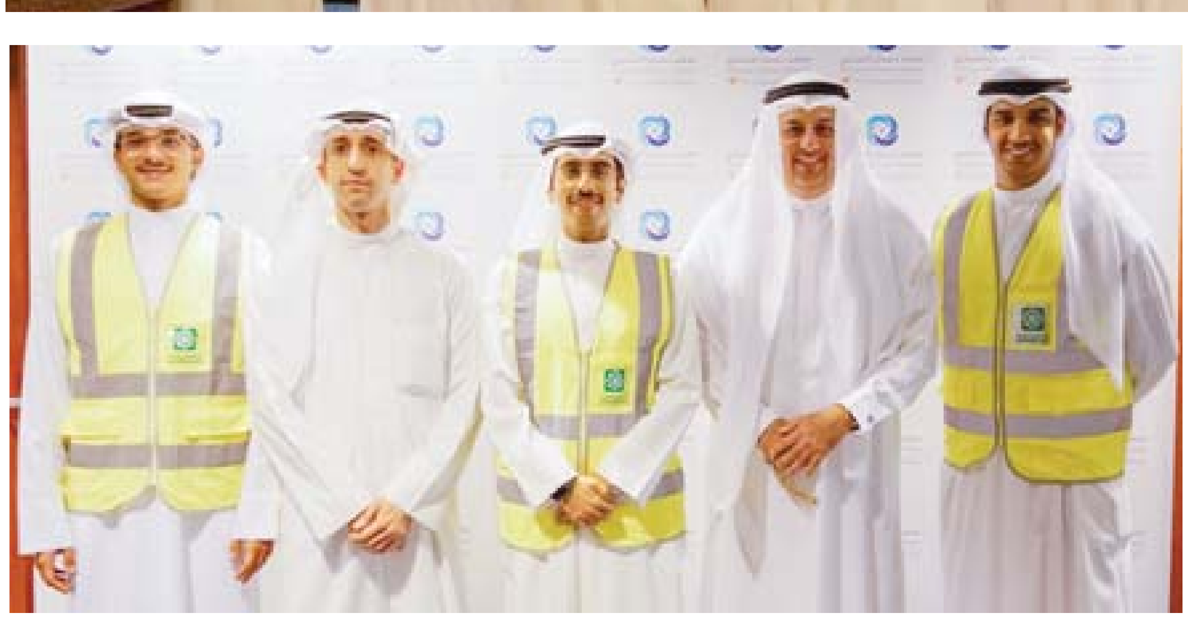

Yousef Al-Ruwaieh

This comes as part of KFH social responsibility and commitment towards the youth initiatives and the health. Al-Ruwaieh said that KFH voluntary team will provide voluntary services to the public and will assist civil defense and security men and distribute food and beverages to worshipers. KFH is keen on reinforcing the human values among society individuals.

KFH voluntary team will be present at different places to meet the public directly and distribute Ramadan presents and confectionaries (Qerqe'an) at different places. KFH will organize several visits to health centers, hospitals and nursing homes to congratulate patients on the Holy month of Ramadan while distributing gifts.


Capital Governor in between the Baitak team











How to fix nature and avoid human misery: UN report

PARIS: Revamping global food production, retooling the financial sector, moving beyond GDP as a measure of progress and other "transformative changes" are needed to save Nature and ourselves, a major UN biodiversity report is set to conclude. Delegates from 130 nations wrap up week-long negotiations in Paris yesterday on the executive summary of a 1,800-page tome authored by 400 scientists, the first UN global assessment of the state of Nature — and its impact on humanity — in 15 years.

The bombshell Summary for Policymakers, to be unveiled on May 6, makes for very grim reading. Up to a million of Earth's estimated eight million species face extinction, many of them within decades, according to a draft version obtained by AFP. All but seven percent of major marine fish stocks are in decline or exploited to the limit of sustainability. At the same time, humanity dumps up to 400 million tons of heavy metals, toxic sludge and other waste into oceans and rivers each year.

Since 1990, Earth has lost 2.9 million hectares — an area more than eight times the size of Germany or Vietnam — of forests that play a critical role in absorbing record-level CO2 emissions. The heavily negotiated text does not make explicit policy recommendations, but will serve "as a basis for redefining our objectives" ahead of a key meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in China next Fall, said Yunne Jai Shin, a researcher at the Research Institute for Development in Marseilles. But the pressure to set clear targets — similar to the cap on global warming in the 2015 climate treaty inked in the French capital — has sparked calls for a "Paris moment" on biodiversity.

'Harmful subsidies'

The new report details how humans are undermining Earth's capacity to produce fresh water, clean air and productive soil, to name a few "ecosystem services". The direct causes of Nature's degradation — in order of importance — are shrinking habitat and land-use change, hunting for food or illicit trade in body parts, climate change, pollution, and predatory or disease-carrying alien species such as rats, mosquitoes and snakes.

"There are also two big indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and climate change — the number of people in the world and their growing ability to consume," Robert Watson, chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), told AFP ahead of the meeting. The way humanity produces, distributes and consumes food — accounting for a third of land, 75 percent of fresh water use and a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions — is especially destructive, the report shows.

Fertilizer use, which degrades the soil's ability to grow plants and absorb CO2, has risen fourfold in just 13 years in Asia, and doubled worldwide since 1990. "Feeding the world in a sustainable manner entails the transformation of food systems," the report notes. Local food production, less demand for meat, fewer chemical inputs, use of renewable power, sustainable limits for fisheries, a sharp decline in tropical deforestation — all are feasible and would help restore Nature. The report also spotlights "harmful subsidies" that encourage environmentally damaging fishing, agriculture, livestock raising, forestry and mining. The report cites estimates that tax havens finance about 70 percent of vessels implicated in unregulated fishing, and an equal share of the soy and beef sectors that are ravaging the Amazon. The summary for policymakers maps out what Watson calls "several plausible futures," some inviting, others less so. One labeled "economic optimism" sees burgeoning international trade unfettered by regulation. Population growth slows, but per capita consumption is high, leading to more climate change and pollution. — AFP

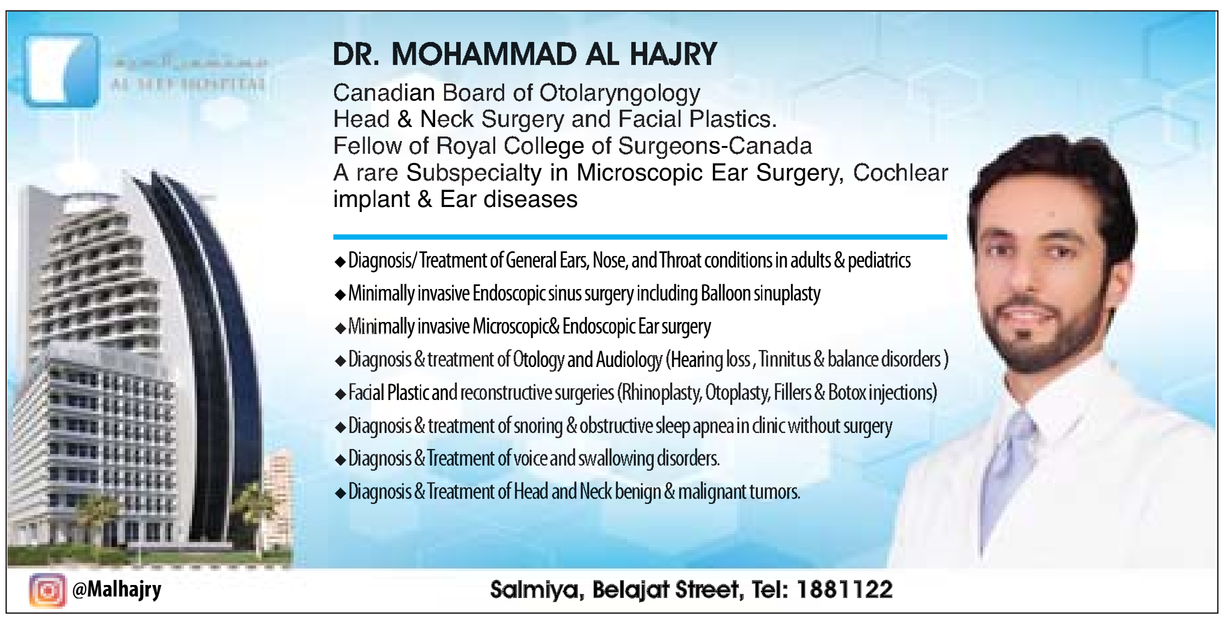
Tiny Australia bird stalls coal project

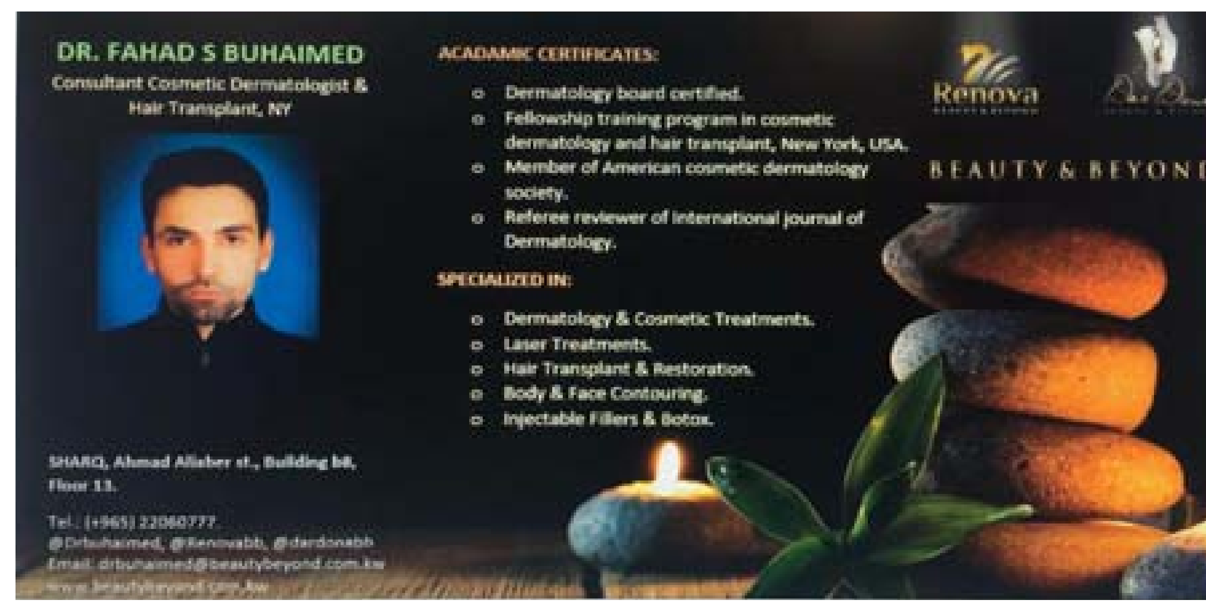
SYDNEY: A tiny finch flew into the centre of Australia's bitter environmental politics Friday when local authorities blocked the construction of a contentious coal mine until the rare bird is protected. The Indian-backed Adani mine in the northeast of the country has become a lightning rod for criticism of the conservative government's lack of environmental policies ahead of a May 18 election.

After months of argument, authorities in Queensland said on Friday that Adani's Carmichael project would be blocked until provisions are made to protect the endangered black-throated finch. While the project has the support of locals hoping it will boost jobs in a state suffering from a mining downturn, it is fiercely opposed by voters elsewhere in the country. The mine would increase Australia's coal exports at a time when many believe the country should be doing more to tackle climate change.

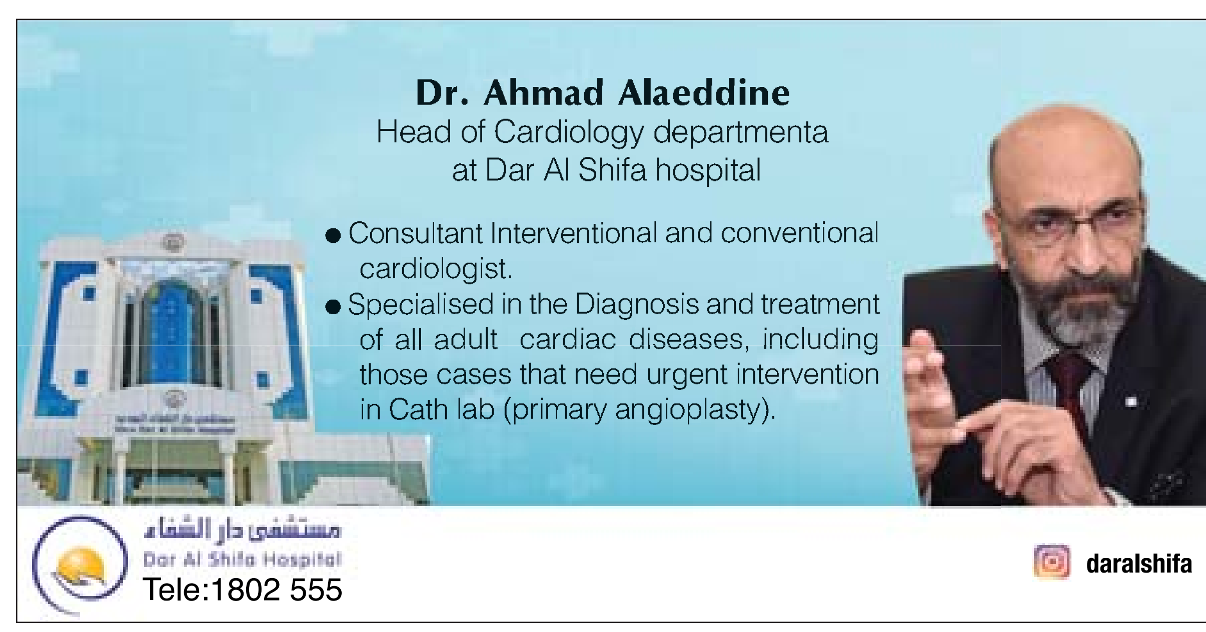
The project is also seen as a gateway — opening the door to tap further deposits in the vast Galilee Basin, boosting transport links and making the argument against further development more difficult. After years of delay, the conservative federal government approved the mine last month, leaving final go-ahead to the opposition-led Labor state government. But on Friday the Queensland government halted the project on conservation grounds, saying Adani's black-throated finch management plan did not meet environmental requirements. Queensland's department of environment said the proposed mine site represented the largest population of the tiny endangered bird, and Adani needed to "gather more accurate information" and resubmit a plan for assessment. The coal miner fired back calling on the state's premier to "show leadership", "take charge" and "once and for all" commit to finalizing environmental plans. — AFP

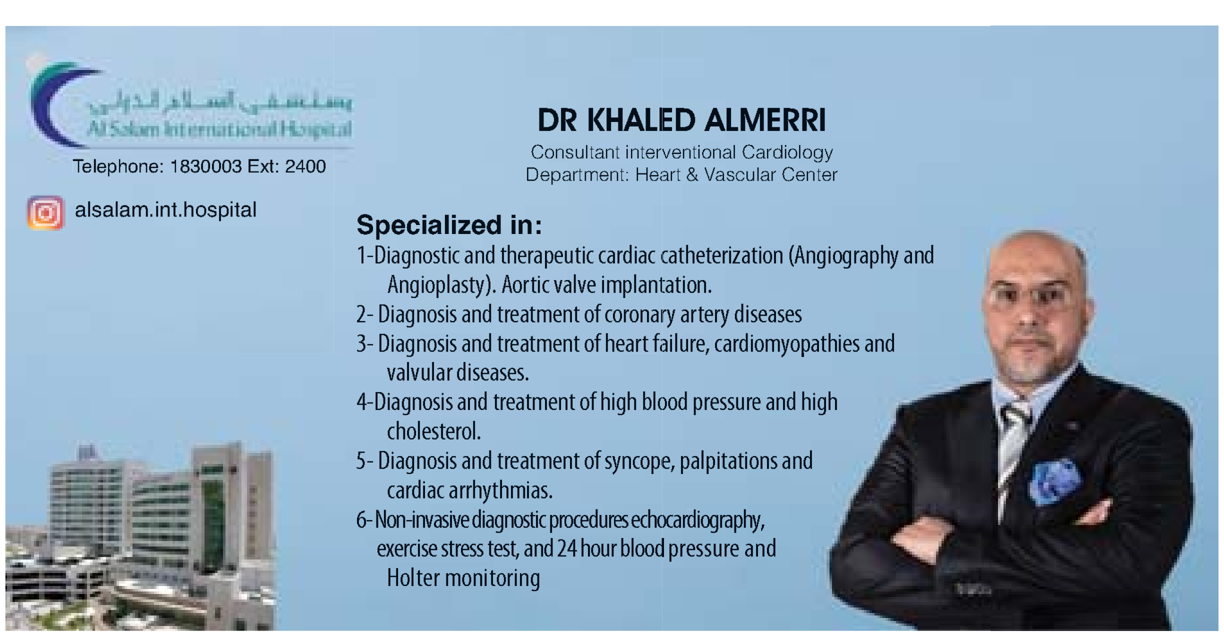

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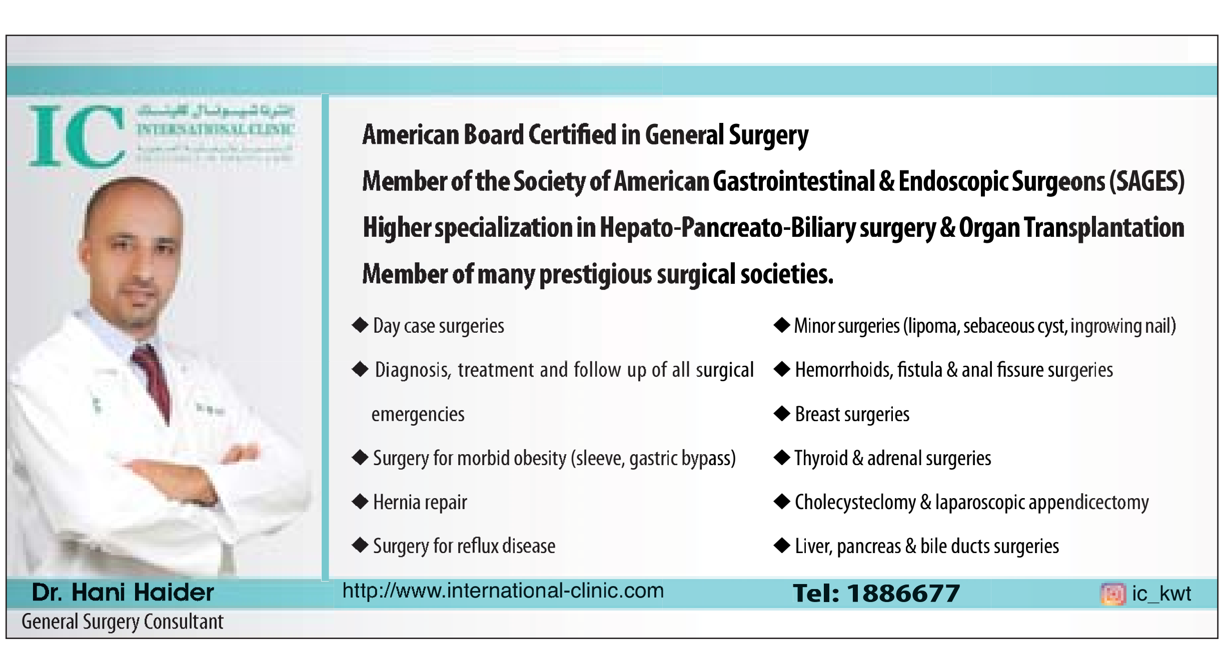

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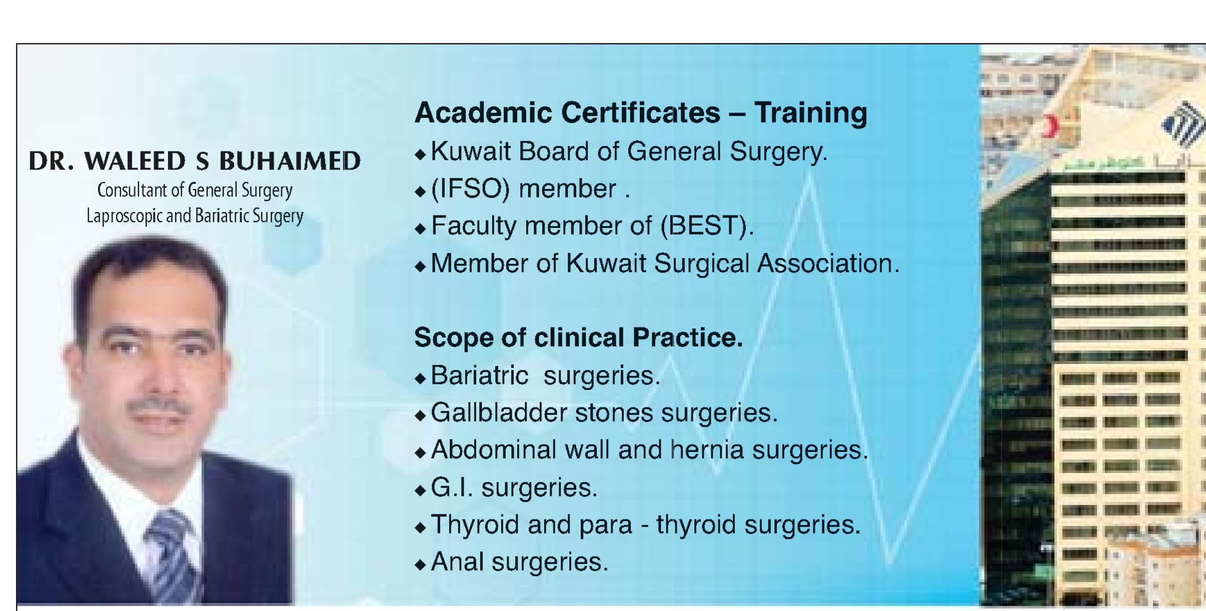

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Kaspersky Lab spotlights cybersecurity trends in the Middle East, Turkey, Africa



By Islam Al-Sharaa

CAPE TOWN: Kaspersky Lab has shared the evolution of the digital threat landscape in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa (META) and worldwide during its annual Cyber Security Weekend, which took place in Cape Town, South Africa. Experts from Kaspersky Lab's Global Research & Analysis Team (GReAT) and featured experts discussed various topics and threats facing organizations and ordinary users nowadays, and shared the required steps to stay safe. Particular focus was laid on modern and emerging technologies such as IoT security, blockchain, and industry-specific threats that can have direct impact on business success and longevity.

Highlighted among the information shared was the META threat landscape during the first quarter of 2019. Kaspersky Lab reported more than 150 million malware attacks in Q1 alone, representing an average of 1.6 million attacks per day, and an alarming 108 percent increase over Q1 2018. With some of the highest mobile phone penetration rates in the world, it is no surprise that the META region also attracts a significant share of malware attacks targeted at mobiles. Mobile malware attacks in META in Q1 2019 numbered more than 368,000, an average of 4,098 per day, and a spike of 118 percent when compared to Q1 2018.

The META region also faced consistent attacks during Q1 2019 in areas such as:

Crypto-mining Malware: 3.16m attacks: daily average of 35k: 146 percent increase over Q1 2018

Phishing: 5.83m attacks: daily average of 64k: 334 percent increase over Q1 2018

Ransomware: 193k attacks: daily average of 2.1k: 18 percent decrease over Q1 2018

"A drop in ransomware incidents is a great showcase of the security consciousness that is growing in the META region. At the same time, we have to realize that if there are less ransomware attacks, malicious attention is being diverted elsewhere. Personal and organization-facing financial threats seem to be growing unabated, and we are using Cyber Security Weekend as a platform to strengthen awareness of new and emerging areas of vulnerability", said Amin Hasbini, Senior security Researcher, Global Research and Analysis Team at Kaspersky Lab.

Calling the continuing need for security awareness and education into clear relief, the Kaspersky Security Network cloud service statistics showed that an average of 27.3 percent of all users in the META region were affected by web threat incidents during Q1 2019. Saudi Arabia had the highest number of users (35.9 percent), while Namibia had the lowest (18.5 percent). Nearly half of all users (average 49.3 percent) in the META region have reported local threats (such as those spread in local networks, via USB/CD/DVD), with the highest concentration in Kenya (56.8 percent), and the lowest in South Africa (43.6 percent).

Users affected by malware in Q1 in META

At a more granular level, Kaspersky Lab revealed the threats faced by individual countries within the META region. This 'street-level' view shows that the threat landscape is not always uniform, and that some countries tend to experience more of certain types of threats than others. For instance, the UAE, with a population of 9 million, has experienced 1.1 million instances of phishing and 23 million instances of malware. Even so, from a numbers standpoint, Turkey takes pole position for incidents of phishing (1.24m), malware (39m), and mobile malware (87k).

Kaspersky Lab's CSW 2019 featured a panel discussion about cyber awareness and cyber education being the key element of building a sustainable protection for any organization - the human firewall. Baran Erdogan, Founder and CTO of Secure Computing, Turkey, who attended the event as an expert guest, commented: "Two major factors that are changing rapidly, significantly increase the need for cyber awareness. The first factor is that the attack perimeters are evolving. In the past IT centric security was mainly taken into consideration since users had limited access to IT resources from less complex interfaces."

"But now corporate data is accessed from everywhere including mobile devices and cloud, and any company that is willing to grow and develop, should make these opportunities accessible as much as possible. Second factor is that attack vectors are getting more complex and user centric. Cybercriminals are focusing on employees since it is much easier to penetrate cyber defense measures from inside of a company by leveraging employees without necessary awareness level rather than from outside," he added.

Recently launched Kaspersky Automated Security Awareness Platform (KASAP), which was also showcased at the event, aims at helping companies of any size to address gaps in employees' cybersecurity skills and knowledge, the online service aims to help companies boost the cyber-awareness of their employees enhancing training efficiency with micro learning, different lessons formats and continuous reinforcement.

Poor security controls

During Kaspersky Lab's annual Cyber Security Weekend 2019 that took place in Cape Town South Africa, Reuben Paul, a 13 year old, 7th grader known as the "Cyber Ninja", was able to hack into a drone, exposing the gaping holes in the security measures of millions of every day gadgets and technology devices, that are part of the Internet of Things (IoT).

Reuben demonstrated that he could disconnect a user from his drone and then take complete control of it by exploiting its insecure protocols. The drone hack performed by the 13 year old was a controlled stunt organized by Kaspersky Lab to highlight the urgent need for stricter security controls into their devices and not put consumers at risk!" he added. Reuben ended by cautioning, "Let us be careful that the Internet of Things does not become the Internet of Threats."

There are around seven billion internet-connected devices in the world according to data from IoT analytics, with the cyber security risk remaining phenomenal. The impacts of these hacks are seen already, with multiple IoT related security incidents happening around the world. Kaspersky Lab experts, therefore gathered to shed light on the consequences IoT threats as well as drone exploitation, whilst educating and raising awareness on potential dangers that could result due to such vulnerabilities.

SIM swap fraud

During Kaspersky Lab's annual Cyber Security Weekend that took place in Cape Town, South Africa, Kaspersky Lab experts discussed the wide spread growth of mobile payments across the globe and the many cyber risks that surround such technology. Especially the recent SIM swap fraud wave, which have become very common in Africa and the wider region. In South Africa this type of fraud more than double in the last year, according a report of South African Banking Risk Information Centre (SABRIC).



Sergey Novikov, Deputy Director, Global Research & Analysis Team (left) and Mohammad Amin Hasbini, Head of Global Research & Analysis team for META Kaspersky Lab during the event.

measures from companies developing Internet of things related-devices such as drones, baby monitors, smart appliances, smart home devices, and connected toys.

Kaspersky Lab advises people to inquire about the security measures taken and to understand the associated risks before buying any connected device. While governments already have tight controls in place around devices such as drones, companies on the other hand, still need to take the security aspect more seriously.

"Many companies compete to get their connected products out to the market and the consumers at the fastest speed to start generating profit. However, doing so often means they overlook the security features or even completely ignore the security issues. Such devices can become lion's meat for hackers and if they fall prey, this could lead to invasion of privacy, loss of data, valuables and even life," said Maher Yamout, Senior Security Researcher at the Global Research and Analysis Team at Kaspersky Lab.

"It took me less than 10minutes to hack the drone and I managed to take full control of it. The insecurities in the drone are shared by other IoT devices. Now imagine if this had been done by cyber-criminals. If I can do it, who's not to say that more motivated cyber-criminals would not be able to do something very similar. The consequences could be disastrous," said Reuben Paul. "We need to reinvent cyber security because what we are doing so far is clearly not enough. It is important for manufacturers to implement

A SIM swap fraud happens when someone convinces your carrier to switch your phone number over to a SIM card that a criminal possesses. In some cases, there are carrier's employees working together with criminals. By diverting your incoming SMS messages, scammers can easily complete the text-based two-factor authentication checks that protect your most sensitive accounts in financial services, social networks, webmail services and instant messengers.

Many African countries are suited to mobile payment methods. In fact, research notes that at the end of 2017, there were 135 live mobile money services across the Sub-Saharan African region, with 122 million active accounts. While payment methods through mobiles offer a convenience that is hard to debate, Kaspersky Lab research shows that mobile payments and the banking system are suffering a wave of attack - mostly powered by SIM swap fraud - and people are losing their money as a result.

This type of attack is used to not only steal credentials and capture one-time passwords (OTPs) sent via an SMS, but also to cause financial damage to victims, resetting the accounts on financial services, allowing to the fraudsters access to currency accounts not only in banks but also in fintechs and credit unions. Fraudsters are also using it as way to steal money using WhatsApp, loading the messages in a new phone, contacting the victim's contacts asking for money, simulating an emergency situation.

"Despite financial inclusion services prospering, the flip side to this is that it opens up a world of opportunities to cybercriminals and fraudsters who are using the convenience a mobile phone offers to exploit and poke holes in a two-factor authentication processes. Frauds using SIM swap are becoming common in Africa and Middle East, affecting countries like South Africa, Turkey and UAE. Countries like Mozambique have experienced this firsthand. The implemented solution, by banks and mobile operators in Mozambique, as a result, is something I believe we must learn from and encourage other regions to investigate and apply, among other aspects, to mobile payment methods of the future - as a way to ensure that mobile phones do not become an enemy in our pockets," said Fabio Assolini, Senior Security Researcher of Kaspersky Lab.

The total money lost in the attacks varies by country: there are extreme cases, such as one in the United Arab Emirates, where one victim lost $ 1 million, while in South Africa one victim reported losing $ 20,000. "In average fraudsters can steal $2,500 to $3,000 per victim, while the cost to perform the SIM swap starts with $10 to $40", conclude Assolini.

In order to protect the growing mobile digital life and payment methods, Kaspersky Lab recommends the following key considerations:

Voice and SMS methods avoided as authentication methods for payments - OTPs in mobile apps like Google Authenticator or the use of physical tokens should be used.

Biometrics - there is no better authentication than that of a physical characteristic. Voice authentication is an option that can be investigated further.

An automated 'Your number will be deactivated' message - to be shared upon SIM swap request. This will support the user to report the activity, if it is not legitimate, faster.

Activate 2FA on WhatsApp-in an attempt to minimize WhatsApp hijacking, activating Two-factor authentication using a six-digit PIN on your device is critical. This supports the user in having an additional layer of security on the device.

MuddyWater's disguise

MuddyWater is an advanced threat actor that first surfaced in 2017. In October 2018, Kaspersky Lab reported on a major operation by MuddyWater, targeting governmental and telecom targetsentities in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as well as neighboring countries like Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The malicious tools and infrastructure uncovered during this investigation show how the threat actor tried to confuse and distract investigators and the security industry - and also reveal a string of operational security failures that ultimately meant this approach failed.

In the first publicly available report on what happens to MuddyWater victims after initial infection, Kaspersky Lab researchers outline the various deception techniques implemented by the attackers. These include Chinese and Russian word strings in the malware code, the use of the filename 'Turk', as well as attempts to impersonate the RXR Saudi Arabia hacking group.

The attackers appear to have been fairly well equipped to achieve their intended goals. Most of the malicious tools discovered were relatively simple and expendable, Python and PowerShell-based tools, and were mainly developed in-house by the group. They seemed to have allowed the attackers flexibility to adapt and customize the toolset for victims.

"MuddyWater's ability to continuously adjust and enhance its attacks to adapt to changes in the Middle Eastern geopolitical scene, have made this group a solid adversary that keeps growing," said Mohamad Amin Hasbini, Head of Global Research & Analysis team for META at Kaspersky Lab. "We expect it to keep developing and to acquire additional tools, maybe even zero-days. Nevertheless, its multiple operational mistakes betray an element of weakness, and provide investigators with trails that lead to important information," he added.

Kaspersky Lab will continue to monitor the group's activities. Details of the latest threat actor activity is available to subscribers of Kaspersky Lab's private threat intelligence reports, which also include Indicators of Compromise (IOC) data and YARA rules to assist in forensics and malware-hunting.



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Sergey Novikov

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Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2019



This picture shows fans posing for photographs with model lightsabers during an event to promote the upcoming unofficial Star Wars Day in Taipei. — AFP

Pitbull takes on 'UglyDolls', bullying and self-acceptance

An animated film about misfit toys seems an unlikely fit for a smooth reggaeton rapper, but Pitbull is front and center in "UglyDolls" and he loves the message it sends. The film, which opens Friday in North America, tells the story of toys who have been discarded for not being "perfect"-and the resolve of one doll, Moxy (singer Kelly Clarkson), to be loved by a child someday. "Perfection doesn't exist and what I want for young people, for kids, is for them to appreciate what it is to be different, that it's something good," Pitbull, who plays UglyDog in the film, told AFP in an interview.



Pitbull attends STX Films World Premiere of "UglyDolls".

Pitbull-real name, Armando Christian Perez-is joined in the cast by a host of other musicians, including country star Blake Shelton, pop futurist Janelle Monae and singers Bebe Rexha and Charli XCX. It's not his first foray on the big screen. The Cuban-American also did voice work for the 2013 animated film "Epic," and his music has been featured on soundtracks of major films such as "Aquaman." But "UglyDolls," the first animated feature from STX Entertainment, dovetails nicely with Pitbull's work to fight bullying and support educational initiatives in Miami's Little Havana, where he grew up.

"If what people are saying about you (online) is affecting you, put down the phone. Why even read it?" says the 38-year-old Grammy-winning singer and producer. The singer, who has 7.5 million Instagram followers, says he's against what he sees as an obsession with social media, especially among young people. "With social media, we're only seeing followers and likes," he says. "Forget about that, we have to be leaders and be unique-that's the important thing. Between filters and Photoshop, we end up looking like people we aren't."

'I keep it light'

Pitbull-known for his fitted suits, smooth bald pate and showy sunglasses-has put out 12 albums, done several collaborations with the likes of Jennifer Lopez, won a Grammy and a Latin Grammy, and performed the official song of the 2014 World Cup. But his younger years were not always easy-he doesn't go far into specifics, but he has talked in the past about tough times, and by age 17, he was selling drugs in Miami.

"Music, thank God (and thanks to the audience), has been an escape for me. Without it, I'd be involved in something else entirely," he said in the interview, liberally mixing English and Spanish. Now, the rapper known as Mr Worldwide wants people "to dance, be joyful, escape." "I keep it light," he says, referring to hits like "El Taxi," "Bon Bon," "Fireball" and "Don't Stop The Party."

Mom knows best

Those involved with "UglyDolls" hope its message of acceptance will spread far and wide. Pitbull says he remembers advice from his mother, whom he also credits with setting him on a new path after his rough past, about dealing with kids who were making fun of his "clown nose" when he was six years old.

"You're going to go to school, you're going to grab your nose and go 'honk, honk' and you're going to tell them that you're a clown-and they won't tease you anymore," he recalled her saying. "And I've applied that advice throughout my whole life: as soon as somebody says something about me, I say 'That's true,' and that's the end of it."— AFP



(Second from left) Nick Jonas, Blake Shelton, Emma Roberts, Pitbull, Janelle Monae, Kelly Clarkson, and Kelly Asbury attend STX Films World Premiere of "UglyDolls" at Regal Cinemas LA Live in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos

'Russian' whale leads to espionage speculations in Norway

A spy, a faraway visitor or a fugitive on the run? A mysterious Beluga whale, caught wearing a suspicious harness, has ignited the imaginations of Norwegians who have yet to receive answers. The whale has been delighting locals in the area of Finnmark in the far north of Norway for the last week. But more than a week after it was first spotted by fishermen in the Arctic waters off the coast of northern Norway its origin remains unknown.

When Jorgen Ree Wiig, a marine biologist working with the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries tracked down the mammal with the help of a fisherman and two colleagues on April 26, they managed to remove an obviously man-made harness attached to it. The harness had a mount suited for an action camera and the text "Equipment St. Petersburg" printed on the plastic clasps. Wiig told AFP on Friday he believed the whale could have come from neighboring Russia, where he believed it might have escaped an enclosure. "The whale is so calm around humans and goes up to boats so it seems to have been accustomed to humans," Wiig said.

Hidden agenda?

Another theory supported by Wiig was that the whale could have been trained by the Russian navy as "they have been known to do so before." Its ease with humans, the markings on the harness together with reports of the Russian Navy training Beluga whales has led many Norwegians to speculate that it could be a "Russian spy." Moscow has not issued any official reaction but an officer quoted by the media has mocked the idea, arguing that the military would not be stupid enough to "leave their phone number" on an animal trained for clandestine activities.

The Barents Sea is a strategic geopolitical area where Western and Russian submarine movements are monitored. It is also the gateway to the Northern Route that shortens maritime routes between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Dmitry Glazov, a scientist working at the Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution of the Russian Academy of Sciences, told Russian news agency Interfax that the Russian Navy had programmes involving whales and that they were in part operating out of Murmansk. "It is a fact that the military has these animals. Among other things, they used them during the Sochi Olympics," Glazov said Monday.



This handout picture released by Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries (Sea Surveillance Service) shows a white whale wearing a harness, which was discovered by fishermen off the coast of northern Norway. — AFP

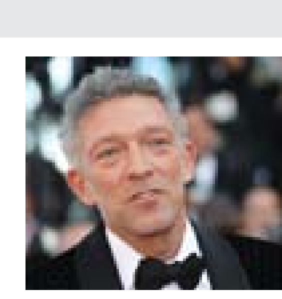
There are also private travel agents around Murmansk advertising tours that involve meeting or diving with Belugas kept in enclosures in the White Sea south of the Kola peninsula. AFP has reached out to two of these agents but has been unable to get a response, as it was a public holiday in the country. The harness itself has been transferred to the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST), but Martin Bernsen, communications officer at PST, said it was unclear whether they would find anything. "We must admit that examining technical equipment attached to whales is not a daily occurrence for PST," he told AFP. "The whale is not a suspect in our investigation, for now," he added.—AFP

French actor Vincent Cassel joins cast of HBO's 'Westworld'

French actor Vincent Cassel is joining the cast of HBO's "Westworld" for the mind-bending science-fiction drama's third season, set to air next year, his team has told AFP-his first recurring television role. The Tinseltown press first reported the casting news this week, with The Hollywood Reporter saying the 52-year-old Frenchman would be playing a villain. "Westworld" unfolds in a near-future amusement park of sorts, where guests interact with androids in various settings and anything goes. But gradually, some of the androids start fighting back.

The series stars Evan Rachel Wood, Thandie Newton, Jeffrey Wright and Ed Harris. Also joining the cast for the new season are "Breaking Bad" alum Aaron Paul and actress-writer Lena Waithe."We're incredibly excited to work with Vincent Cassel," show creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy said in a statement released by HBO. "We've been longtime fans of his and are thrilled for him to join the Westworld team."

Cassel's breakthrough role came in 1995 with "La Haine," a searing portrayal of life in Paris's racially polarized suburbs. A series of big-screen roles followed in France, and then Cassel crossed over to Hollywood with featured parts in heist capers "Ocean's Twelve" and "Ocean's Thirteen." He starred alongside Oscar winner Natalie Portman in the dark psychodrama "Black Swan." In 2009, Cassel won the Cesar-France's Oscars-for best actor for his portrayal of legendary French gangster Jacques Mesrine in a two-part film. — AFP



In this file photo French actor Vincent Cassel poses as he arrives for the screening of the film "Girls of the Sun (Les Filles du Soleil)" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP







OOREDOO CELEBRATES GRAISH WITH ITS STAFF

With the participation of Arab sports legends

Reinforcing the one-family spirit among its staff, Ooredoo Kuwait celebrated the Kuwaiti tradition of Graish, a feast that precedes the holy month of Ramadan. Employees from different departments and sectors gathered to exchange greetings on the occasion of the commencement of Ramadan, reviving the annual Kuwaiti tradition. The company's different floors were adorned in traditional sadu colors and lively decorations.

The company held an engaging competition between departments, where they were judged for being the best and most hospitable hosts. Employees from different departments competed in decorating their floors, presenting traditional Kuwait dishes and desserts, as well as creative engaging activities that all come together to play a big role in winning the competition. Making this year's Graish special, surprise guests of Arab sports legends and celebrities participated in the judging panel, including soccer legends Jassim Yaqoub, Saad Al-Houti and captain Wael Gomaa, star commentator Khaled Al-Harban, star sport presenters Hafid Derradji and Mohammed Saadon Al-Kuwari.

Ooredoo routinely holds events and activities for its staff around the year, to foster communication among the different departments. The company is also proudly gearing up to launch its full program of charitable activities during the holy month of Ramadan in collaboration with members of its volunteer program, which is launched for the fifth consecutive year. The program volunteers will be responsible for distributing hundreds of iftar meals in the company's iftar tent and around Kuwait in the areas of residence for laborers and families in need.









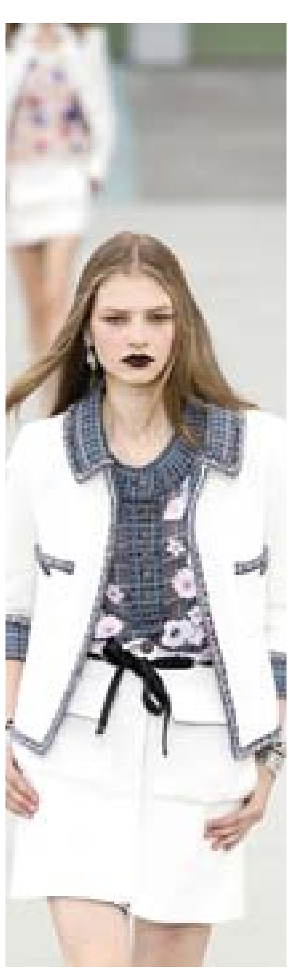






Models present creations during the 2020 Chanel Croisiere (Cruise) fashion show at the Grand Palais in Paris. — AFP photos

Post-Karl Chanel takes train back to classy elegance









Virginie Viard made a classy and elegant debut in her first complete collection for Chanel Friday after taking over from the late Karl Lagerfeld at the iconic French label. The designer, who was Lagerfeld's right-hand woman for years, emerged from his shadow with a highly feminine and wearable cruise collection in a minimalist show at the Grand Palais in Paris, the scene of the Kaiser's most decadent extravaganzas. Where Lagerfeld was flashy and streetwise, his successor was restrained, with the bling factor turned right down in favor of a flattering slimline look.

Instead she harked back to the golden age of train travel when the brand's founder Coco Chanel would take her arty friends on the "Train bleu" down to her villa on the French Riviera near Monaco. But instead of recreating a life-sized locomotive or the Orient Express inside the vast Grand Palais as Lagerfeld might have, Viard went with an understated train platform with the front row either side of a recessed train track.

There was, however, an affectionate nod to her predecessor, who died aged 85 in February, with a couple of starched white collars which were a key component of Lagerfeld's own highly recognizable personal look. With the heavily pregnant Hollywood star Keira Knightley in the front row, and Taiwanese actress Hannah Quinlivan and singer Jay Chou also looking on, Viard made a clever grab to steal the femininity mantle of arch-rivals Dior.

With cruise collections all about looking chic as you go off on holiday, Viard said "travelling across the world is part of Chanel's spirit" and she wanted to create a silhouette that was all about movement.

Practical chic

Nothing showed off her new practical elegance more than a cobalt blue jacket with layer after layer of pockets set off with a white band across the chest tied in a bow. It was worn with two-tone pointed boots-two-tone shoes were ever-present in the collection-and a classic Chanel black handbag expanded out into a travel bag. Jackets and generous garbardine trousers fastened with double buttons at the waist were inspired by work uniforms, and hooded trenchcoats were feminized with chain belts.

The railway theme found its way into the clothes with the mechanism of station clocks popping up on dresses and a clutch bag in the form of a railway worker's lamp. Beyond the classic Chanel blacks, creams and whites, Viard lifted the collection's subdued color palette with luminous pinks, greens and eggshell blues. Red poppies, blue cornflowers and delicately embroidered pink flowers popped up on dresses and check tops, and were also used as a contrast to the label's traditional tweed twin-sets.

Viard also debuted a new version of the Chanel jacket paired with leggings sparkling with the label's logo as well as miniskirts and knickerbockers, with tweed culottes ending at the knee. The same modern touch popped up in two-tone heels, with black stilettos livened with red and fuchsia as well as tweed ballerina shoes. — AFP







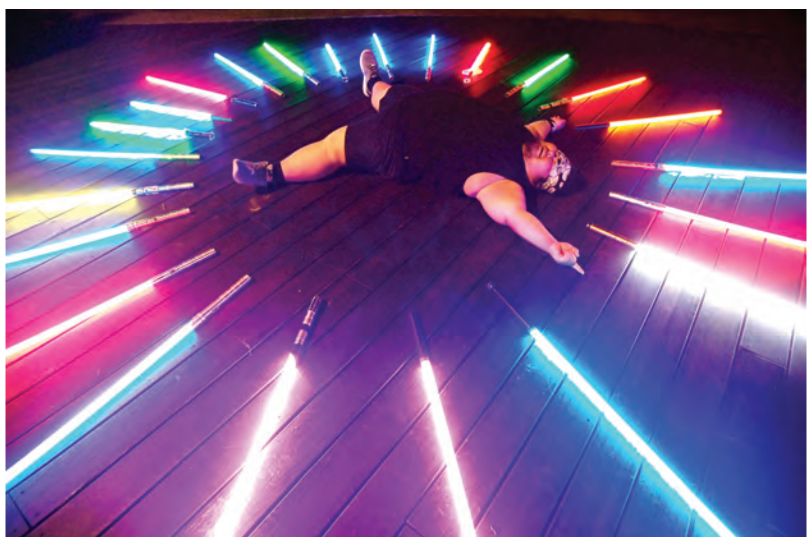






Kuwait Times
Established 1961

Sunday, May 5, 2019



Makoto Tsai posing for photographs with lightsabers during an event to promote the upcoming unofficial Star Wars Day in Taipei. — AFP photos



Star Wars memorabilia at the workshop of Makoto Tsai, who handcrafts lightsabers for fans of the movie saga, in New Taipei City.



Replica Star Wars lightsabers at Makoto Tsai's workshop in New Taipei City.

Attack of the clones as Star Wars fans design own lightsabers



Makoto Tsai, who handcrafts lightsabers for Star Wars fans.



Makoto Tsai, who handcrafts lightsabers for Star Wars fans, cuts wires while making a model of the movie saga's famous energy swords at his workshop in New Taipei City.



A fan holding a mask during an event to promote the upcoming unofficial Star Wars Day in Taipei.

Frustrated by the lack of quality lightsabers in toy shops, Makoto Tsai did what any self-respecting hardcore Star Wars fan would do-he studied engineering at college and then spent years perfecting a replica. The 36-year-old is part of a small group of artisans around the world who have forged successful careers hand-crafting remarkably realistic models of the movie saga's famous energy swords. As fans gather globally on May 4th for what has become the unofficial Star Wars Day-this year mourning the death of towering Chewbacca actor Peter Mayhew-many will be clutching one of Tsai's lightsabers, made in his workshop near Taipei.

In the past decade he has shipped around 1,000 blades to some 40 countries as diverse as the United States, France and Cuba to Peru, Iceland and Tunisia. Prices start at $255 and around 80 percent of his orders come from abroad. Local and ethnic Chinese fans are offered a half price discount, providing that they pass a written test "to prove they have enough passion for Star Wars". "I hand-make every piece of work so it's very intimate to me. I only want those who really like it to own it," he told AFP at his memorabilia filled workshop.

Star Wars may be a multi-billion dollar Hollywood franchise but fans have long complained that the official lightsabers on the market are flimsy and disappointing versions of the whizzing, crackling, swords seen in the films. As a result a whole cottage industry has sprung up of replica manufacturers filling a gap that more established companies have uncharacteristically failed to fill.

Retro origins

Advances in battery, LED and computing technology have helped these artisans create increasingly sophisticated replicas, many of them choosing to avoid overt branding from the films to reduce their exposure on copyright issues. Bright tubes of light and motion-linked audio cards similar to the film's sound effects are now standard. Among fans of the custom saber scene, California-based Michael Murphy is known as "Yoda". His online shop and forum FXSabers.com is the go to place for those trading tips on where to buy and how to build the best lightsabers.

"As far as people doing installations like myself and Makoto, I'd say it's grown from the original group of 25 back in the early years to well over 100 people out there in forums and on Facebook offering services for sabers in one way or another," he told AFP. The original lightsaber wielded by Luke Skywalker in the first 1977 installment-a remarkably budget production compared to its lavish follow-ups-was little more than the handle of an old Graflex camera flash.

Those retro flashes have now become notoriously hard to source thanks to Star Wars fans. The most expensive fan-built lightsaber replicas which feature original Graflex handles have sold for as much as $15,000 on eBay. Tsai first fell for Star Wars as a teenager and his quest for a realistic lightsaber prompted him to study electro-optical engineering and then work in that industry until he became a full-time lightsaber maker over a decade ago.

Tsai said he constantly researches to make his lightsabers "brighter, more durable and easier to manoeuver" so they can be used in fencing, which he has been promoting in Taiwan with regular duels. The business also supports fan and charity gatherings he organizes free-of-charge. "I spend two-thirds of my time organizing events. My mission is to promote Star Wars in Taiwan as hard as I can to draw out more fans," he added.

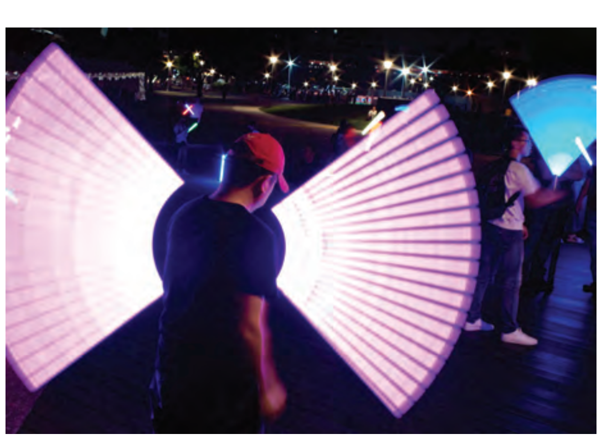
'May the force be with you'

One of Tsai's proudest moments was an outing to Taiwan's presidential office on last year's Star Wars Day. Darth Vader, Chewbacca and a motley crew of intergalactic characters chanted "May the force be with you" alongside Vice President Chen Chien-jen, while toy gun-toting stormtroopers joined military police to stand guard outside the landmark in downtown Taipei. This year fans will gather near the renowned Taipei 101 skyscraper to mark the day, he said. With plenty more Star Wars films planned by the Disney-owned franchise in the years ahead, Tsai is confident he'll have new generations of fans flocking to buy his sabres.

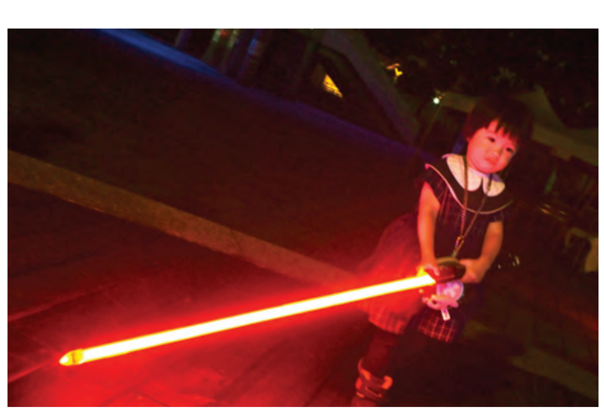


Fans using model lightsabers during an event.

"I am very optimistic that there will be more and more die-hard fans and we can definitely keep the momentum for at least another decade," he said. College student Kuo Shun-hao, 20, became a fan two years ago after watching the seventh installment "Star Wars: The Force Awakens"-the JJ Abrams reboot that brought fresh critical acclaim to the franchise and a new windfall for Disney. Kuo now regularly fences with his lightsabers. "I like sparring and talking about Star War movies with other fans," he said, adding: "I am making new friends as there are often new people coming to our fencing gatherings."— AFP



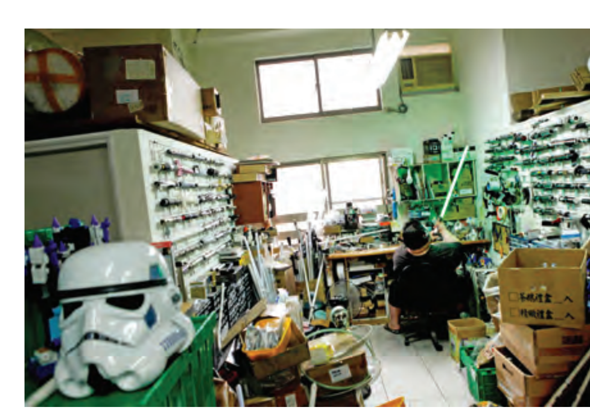
Fans using model lightsabers during an event to promote the upcoming unofficial Star Wars Day in Taipei.



A fan using a model lightsaber during an event to promote the upcoming unofficial Star Wars Day in Taipei.



Makoto Tsai, who handcrafts lightsabers for Star Wars fans, poses for a photograph with a R2-D2 toy robot at his workshop in New Taipei City.



Makoto Tsai, who handcrafts lightsabers for Star Wars fans, in his workshop in New Taipei City.

Actor **Peter Mayhew,** Chewbacca in 'Star Wars' saga, dead at 74

Actor Peter Mayhew, who won over fans worldwide as the Wookiee warrior Chewbacca in the blockbuster "Star Wars" movies, has died at the age of 74, his family announced on Thursday. Mayhew died on Tuesday at his home in Texas, surrounded by loved ones, the family said in a statement released on the actor's Twitter account. "He put his heart and soul into the role of Chewbacca and it showed in every frame of the films from his knock-kneed running, firing his bowcaster from the hip, his bright blue eyes, down to each subtle movement of his head and mouth," the statement said.



In this file photo actor Peter Mayhew attends the World Premiere of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens", in Hollywood, California.

"But, to him, the Star Wars family meant so much more than a role in a film. The relationships that began then grew into the friends and family that he would love for decades to come." The towering British-born actor, who was the son of a policeman, measured seven feet three inches (2.21 meters) and was working as a hospital attendant in London when he was discovered by film producer Charles Schneer. He was first cast in the film "Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger," in an uncredited role.

But he then was cast in the role that would define his career-as the co-pilot and best friend of Han Solo (Harrison Ford) in the original "Star Wars" film released in 1977. The role was unconventional to say the least-a giant, hairy, 200-year-old humanoid from the planet Kashyyyk. Mayhew once joked at a fan convention in 2013 that all he had to do when auditioning for the role of "Chewie"-as the beloved character-was to show his height.

"In George's office, he had a sofa," he said, referring to "Star Wars" creator George Lucas. "So I sat down on the sofa waiting for him to come in through the door. He and (producer) Gary Kurtz walked in. "I did the natural thing, I stood up," he added. "Basically, that was the interview. He turned to Gary and said, 'I think we've found him'." Chewbacca communicated in roars and growls, but Mayhew did not provide the vocals-those signature noises came from a sound engineer.



In this file photo taken on December 16, 2015 british actor Peter Mayhew (left) and US actor Harrison Ford attend the opening of the European Premiere of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" in central London. — AFP photos

'Gentlest of giants'

After the original film, Mayhew would go on to appear in "The Empire Strikes Back" (1980), "Return of the Jedi" (1983) and "Revenge of the Sith" (2005) — the third film in the prequel trilogy. Mayhew's family said he had "fought his way back from being wheelchair-bound to stand tall and portray Chewbacca once more in 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'," which was released in 2015. He then worked to coach his successor in the role, Joonas Suotamo, the family statement said.

As news of Mayhew's death became public, tributes began to pour in on social media, including from several of his "Star Wars" co-stars and Lucas himself. Ford, who piloted the legendary Millennium Falcon with Chewie at his side, paid tribute to the "wit and grace" Mayhew brought to his "Star Wars" character. "We were partners in film and friends for over 30 years and I loved him," the actor said in a statement. "He invested his soul in the character and brought great pleasure to the Star Wars audience. Chewbacca was an important part of the success of the films we made together." Mark Hamill, who portrayed Luke Skywalker in the iconic films, described Mayhew as the "gentlest of giants-A big man with an even bigger heart who never failed to make me smile & a loyal friend who I loved dearly."

Lucas, in a statement to US media, said Mayhew "was the closest any human being could be to a Wookiee: big heart, gentle nature... and I learned to always let him win." Suotamo thanked Mayhew for his "tutelage and kindness as we sought to bring Chewbacca to life for a new generation," adding: "Rest assured his legacy will live on." Mayhew effectively made "Star Wars" his career. Other than the films, he made guest appearances as the character, notably on "The Muppet Show" and musical comedy series "Glee." He had very few roles outside the franchise. The actor is survived by his wife Angie and three children. The family said a memorial service would be held on June 29. A separate memorial for fans will take place in early December in Los Angeles at "Star Wars" convention Empire Con. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, May 5, 2019



STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

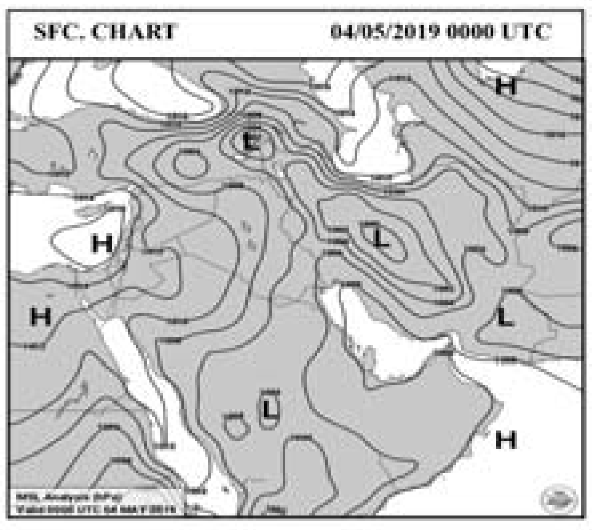
BY DAY: Hot and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southerly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 45 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for scattered rain.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 45 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at

WEATHER WATCH	HASH(0x407526c4)

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	39 °C	30 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	39 °C	27 °C
ABDALY	40 °C	28 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	41 °C	28 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	39 °C	27 °C
SALMIYAH	33 °C	30 °C
AHMADI	32 °C	30 °C
NUWAISIB	41 °C	27 °C
WAFRA	41 °C	26 °C
SALMY	40 °C	25 °C

SFC. CHART 04/05/2019 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures MAX.	Temperatures MIN.	Wind Direction	Wind Speed
Sunday	05/05	Hot with a chance for rising dust and some scattered clouds will appear	38 °C	24 °C	NW	15 - 45 km/h
Monday	05/06	Hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	40 °C	24 °C	NW	10 - 32 km/h
Tuesday	05/07	Hot and Partly cloudy	41 °C	25 °C	NW	12 - 35 km/h
Wednesday	05/08	Hot and Cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	40 °C	26 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:37
Sunrise	05:04
Zuhr	11:45
Asr	15:21
Sunset	18:26
Isha	19:50

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	40 °C
MIN. Temp.	21 °C
MAX. RH	56 %
MIN. RH	11 %
MAX. Wind	S 28 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Government of Canada Gouvernement du Canada

The Embassy of Canada

in Kuwait seeks two full time positions:

1-Security Officer
The ideal applicant must have experience in the field of security/crisis management, speak English and Arabic and be legally residing in Kuwait.

2- Receptionist
The ideal applicant must speak English, French and Arabic and be legally residing in Kuwait.

To apply, please follow the link **www.kuwait.gc.ca**, complete the online application form and upload a CV and a covering letter by the Closing date: 09 / 05 / 2019

Please note that only those chosen for further consideration will be contacted.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Zeny Lemniota Azavedo r/o H.No. 186, Mokim Cuncolim Goa would like to change my name from Zeny Lemiota Azavedo to Zeny Lemniota Azavedo and my mother's name from Lucy Francisca Josefina Caeiro to Lucy Josefina Francisquinha Caeiro as per the birth certificate. **(C 5525)**
5-5-2019

Hakimuddin S/o Shabbir Husain Jawddiya Passport No. Z2689498 has change my name from Hakimuddin I want to add my surname as Jawddiya. Given name: Hakimuddin. Surname: Jawddiya. **(C 5523)**

I, Hakimuddin father of Munira, holder of Indian Passport No. L9664327, issued at Kuwait 19/06/2014 and presently residing at Khaitan, do hereby change my daughter name from Munira to given name: Munira, surname: Jawddiya. **(C 5523)**

I, Varughese Benoy, Indian Passport holder No: L3819609 issued in Kuwait hereby change name as it appears in my passport from given name: Varughese Benoy to given name: Benoy, surname: Varughese for all future purposes. **(C 5524)**
2-5-2019

I, Gayathri Vinodkrishnan D/o Vinod Krishnan Erath Unikkat holder of Indian passport No: S9918782 has changed my name from Gayathri Vinodkrishnan to Gayathri Vinod Krishnan hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Gayathri Vinod Krishnan. **(C 5522)**

Flight Schedule

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 5/5/2019

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10
THY	772	Istanbul	00:20
JZR	254	Amman	00:20
KAC	102	London	00:50
DLH	625	Dammam	00:50
KAC	504	Beirut	01:00
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:00
JZR	734	Cairo	01:00
JZR	710	Luxor	01:05
UAE	853	Dubai	01:40
KLM	446	Bahrain	01:45
PGT	840	Istanbul	01:50
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:50
KKK	1268	Istanbul	01:55
JZR	724	Alexandria	02:05
KAC	540	Sharm el-Sheikh	02:15
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:15
QTR	1086	Doha	02:30
KAC	414	Bangkok	02:40
PGT	860	Istanbul	02:50
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05
OMA	643	Muscat	03:05
RJA	648	Amman	03:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15
KAC	418	Manila	03:20
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00
KAC	382	Delhi	04:05
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:25
JZR	404	Hyderabad	04:30
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:05
THY	770	Istanbul	05:20
JZR	402	Mumbai	05:25
KAC	344	Chennai	05:30
KAC	552	Cairo	05:45
JZR	112	Doha	05:50
BAW	157	London	06:10
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:15
JZR	714	Sohag	06:20
KAC	678	Dubai	06:40
KAC	204	Lahore	06:45
QTR	8511	Doha	07:00
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:05
KAC	358	Kochi	07:25
UAE	855	Dubai	07:35
IGO	1755	CNN	08:00
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:05
KAC	384	Delhi	08:10
JZR	708	Luxor	08:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:50
OMA	641	Muscat	09:00
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00
FDB	5055	Dubai	09:20
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40
JZR	410	Delhi	09:50
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
MEA	404	Beirut	10:55
QTR	1074	Doha	11:00
SYR	341	Damascus	11:00
JZR	716D	Sohag	12:10
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30
THY	766	Istanbul	12:30
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:30
UAE	871	Dubai	12:45
MSR	610	Cairo	12:45
KAC	742	Dammam	12:55
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:10
KAC	774	Riyadh	13:35
JZR	212	Jeddah	13:45
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
FDB	5059	Dubai	14:15
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:15
KAC	364	Colombo	14:35
KAC	562	Amman	14:40
KAC	792	Madinah	14:40
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45
JZR	222	Riyadh	14:45
KAC	304	Mumbai	14:45
KAC	618	Doha	14:50
KAC	788	Jeddah	14:55
JZR	602	Baku	15:00
KAC	118	New York	15:00
KAC	692	Muscat	15:00
KAC	516	Tehran	15:00
KNE	529	Jeddah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
OMA	645	Muscat	15:20
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
KAC	546	Cairo	15:50
FEG	341	Sohag	16:00
FDB	051	Dubai	16:10
QTR	1072	Doha	16:15
KAC	502	Beirut	16:15
JZR	116	Doha	17:05
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:10
JZR	710	Luxor	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
IRA	665	Shiraz	17:35
JZR	214	Jeddah	17:35
JZR	104	Bahrain	18:00
QTR	1080	Doha	18:10
JZR	302	Istanbul	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
JZR	704	Asyut	18:45
RJA	640	Amman	19:05
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:05
UAE	875	Dubai	19:05
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:20
KAC	156	Istanbul	19:25
RBG	555	Alexandria	19:40
KAC	616	Bahrain	19:40
KAC	776	Riyadh	19:45
KAC	166	Rome	20:00
KAC	104	London	20:00
FDB	057	Dubai	20:05
OMA	647	Muscat	20:05
DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:10
MEA	402	Beirut	20:15
KAC	542	Cairo	20:35
QTR	1088	Doha	20:40
KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:00
KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:00
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:10
UAE	859	Dubai	21:15
ALK	229	Colombo	21:15
THY	764	Istanbul	21:30
KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:50
KAC	622	Doha	21:50
KAC	564	Amman	21:55
KAC	162	Geneva	22:00
QTR	1082	Doha	22:05
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
KAC	786	Jeddah	22:20
AIC	981	Chennai/Ahmedabad	22:25
JZR	128	Dubai	22:50
MSC	405	Sohag	23:15
MSR	614	Cairo	23:30
FDB	071	Dubai	23:35

Departure Flights on Sunday 5/5/2019

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
JZR	713	Sohag	00:10
MSR	615	Cairo	00:30
BBC	044	Dhaka	00:40
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JZR	409	Delhi	01:10
IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
KAC	677	Dubai	01:40
THY	773	Istanbul	01:50
DLH	625	Frankfurt	01:50
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
JZR	111	Doha	02:10
JZR	707	Luxor	02:50
THY	765	Istanbul	02:50
PGT	859	Istanbul	02:50
PGT	841	Istanbul	02:50
KKK	1269	Istanbul	02:55
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:10
UAE	854	Dubai	03:30
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
OMA	644	Muscat	04:05
QTR	1087	Doha	04:15
MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
PGT	861	Istanbul	04:20
LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
QTR	1077	Doha	05:15
KAC	303	Mumbai	05:15
KAC	103	London	05:20
JZR	715D	Sohag	06:00
THY	771	Istanbul	06:30
GFA	212	Bahrain	06:50
RJA	649	Amman	07:00
JZR	211	Jeddah	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:00
KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	165	Rome	08:00
KAC	501	Beirut	08:50
KAC	545	Cairo	08:50
KAC	561	Amman	08:55
QTR	8512	Doha	09:00
IGO	1756	CNN	09:00
KAC	613	Bahrain	09:00
KAC	161	Geneva	09:00
UAE	856	Dubai	09:05
KAC	117	New York	09:05
KAC	791	Madinah	09:10
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:15
JZR	601	Baku	09:20
KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:40
KAC	741	Dammam	09:40
KAC	773	Riyadh	09:40
JZR	301	Istanbul	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
OMA	642	Muscat	10:00
KAC	101	London	10:05
FDB	5056	Dubai	10:15
KAC	515	Tehran	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
KAC	155	Istanbul	10:40
KAC	617	Doha	10:40
SVA	513	Riyadh	10:55
JZR	709	Luxor	11:20
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:35
MEA	405	Beirut	11:55
SYR	342	Damascus	12:00
JZR	213	Jeddah	12:05
QTR	1075	Doha	12:10
JZR	703	Asyut	12:20
KAC	541	Cairo	13:30
SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
MSR	611	Cairo	13:45
THY	767	Istanbul	14:00
AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:10
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:00
JZR	103	Bahrain	15:05
FDB	5060	Dubai	15:05
QTR	1079	Doha	15:15
SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
JZR	405	Kochi	16:00
KAC	775	Riyadh	16:05
KAC	615	Bahrain	16:10
KAC	563	Amman	16:10
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:15
KAC	785	Jeddah	16:20
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
OMA	646	Muscat	16:20
KAC	619	Doha	16:25
FEG	442	Asyut	16:55
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
FDB	052	Dubai	17:10
QTR	1073	Doha	17:25
KAC	283	Dhaka	17:40
KAC	503	Beirut	17:40
UAE	858	Dubai	17:40
KAC	343	Chennai	17:50
KAC	621	Doha	17:50
KAC	381	Delhi	17:55
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:10
JZR	127	Dubai	18:20
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:25
JZR	733	Cairo	18:35
JZR	501	Lahore	18:35
IRA	664	Shiraz	18:35
JZR	253	Amman	19:10
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	19:20
JZR	723	Alexandria	19:20
QTR	1081	Doha	19:20
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
GFA	218	Bahrain	19:50
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:00
RJA	641	Amman	20:05
RBG	556	Alexandria	20:20
JZR	401	Mumbai	20:30
UAE	876	Dubai	20:35
KAC	351	Kochi	20:45
FDB	058	Dubai	20:50
DLH	624	Dammam	20:55
KAC	333	Trivandrum	21:05
OMA	648	Muscat	21:05
MEA	403	Beirut	21:15
KAC	301	Mumbai	21:25
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
QTR	1089	Doha	21:50
KAC	203	Lahore	22:00
KLM	445	Bahrain	22:10
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
ALK	230	Colombo	22:20
KAC	383	Delhi	22:35
UAE	860	Dubai	22:35
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:50
KAC	783	Jeddah	22:55
KAC	551	Cairo	23:00
KAC	411	Bangkok	23:00
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20

China 'putting Muslims in concentration camps'

WASHINGTON: The United States has accused China of putting well more than a million minority Muslims in "concentration camps," in some of the strongest US condemnation to date of what it calls Beijing's mass detention of mostly Muslim Uighur minority and other Muslim groups. The comments by Randall Schriver, who leads Asia policy at the US Defense Department, are likely to increase tension with Beijing, which is sensitive to international criticism and describes the sites as vocational education training centers aimed at stemming the threat of Islamic extremism.

Former detainees have described to Reuters being tortured during interrogation at the camps, living in crowded cells and being subjected to a brutal daily regimen of party indoctrination that drove some people to suicide. Some of the sprawling facilities are ringed with razor wire and watch towers. "The (Chinese) Communist Party is using the security forces for mass imprisonment of Chinese Muslims in concentration camps," Schriver told a Pentagon briefing during a broader discussion about China's military, estimating that the number of detained Muslims could be "closer to 3 million citizens."

Schriver, an assistant secretary of defense, defended his use of a term normally associated with Nazi Germany as appropriate, under the circumstances. When asked by a reporter why he used the term, Schriver said that it was justified "given what we understand to be the magnitude of the detention, at least a million but likely closer to 3 million citizens out of a population of about 10 million."

"So a very significant portion of the population, (given) what's happening there, what the goals are of the Chinese government and their own public comments make that a very, I think, appropriate description," he said. The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday used the term re-education camps to describe the sites and said Chinese activity was "reminiscent of the 1930s."

The US government has weighed sanctions against senior Chinese officials in Xinjiang, a vast region bordering central Asia that is home to millions of Uighurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities. China has warned that it would retaliate "in proportion" against any US sanctions. The governor of Xinjiang in March directly dismissed comparisons to concentration camps, saying they were "the same as boarding schools."

US officials have said China has made criminal many aspects of religious practice and culture in Xinjiang, including punishment for teaching Muslim texts to children and bans on parents giving their children Uighur names. Academics and journalists have documented grid-style police checkpoints across Xinjiang and mass DNA collection, and human rights advocates have decried martial law-type conditions there. — Reuters



TASHKURGAN, China: Tourists leave the Pakistan-China Khunjerab Pass, the world's highest paved border crossing at 4,600 meters above sea level. China has freed dozens of Uighur women from internment camps on condition they prove their 'adaptability to Chinese society.' — AFP

Trump, Democrats cross swords; 2020 election looms

WASHINGTON: Congressional Democrats and President Donald Trump are locked in a constitutional showdown over their powers to investigate him, exchanging threats that present risks for both sides as they head into the 2020 election. In a clash over the balance of power between the government's legislative and executive branches, the Trump administration is stonewalling congressional investigators and asserting that it is within its rights to do so.

On Capitol Hill, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, one of several senior Democrats leading probes of Trump, his presidency and his businesses, issued a dire warning: "The challenge we face is that the president of the United States wants desperately to prevent Congress, a co-equal branch of government, from providing any check whatsoever on even his most reckless decisions," Nadler said in a hearing on Thursday. "The very system of government in the United States, the system of limited power, the system of not having a president as a dictator is very much at stake."

His remarks came after Attorney General William Barr, a Trump appointee, refused to attend the same hearing before Nadler's committee, which is examining Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election and Trump's efforts to stifle the probe. In an unprecedented approach, Trump in recent days has filed lawsuits meant to block congressional subpoenas that were sent to two banks and an accounting firm that have worked with his businesses, which he did not divest when he took office. The subpoenas seek access to past financial records for Trump.

A businessman-turned-politician, Trump also still refuses to disclose any of his annual tax returns, rejecting decades of practice by recent presidents. Standing by their president, Republicans in Congress dismissed as hollow Nadler's rhetoric about Trump's defiance and played down Barr's refusal to attend the House hearing.

The Republicans complained that Nadler wanted committee staff lawyers to be able to question Barr, a departure from the standard hearing format where lawmakers do the questioning. They stressed Barr's readiness to defend his handling of the Mueller report before a Republican-controlled Senate panel on the day before he skipped the House hearing. On Nadler's comments, Republican Representative Tom Cole said, "It's over the top. The attorney general showed up before the Senate committee and took every question."

The partisan shouting match in Washington is intensifying as a platoon of Democratic presidential hopefuls hit the campaign trail, with Trump lobbing Twitter insults at the front-runners. Both sides run risks in ramping up their confrontation. The Democrats could turn off voters if they push too hard to investigate, and perhaps ultimately try to impeach Trump, allowing him to play the victim, a role he excels in.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, the leading Democrat in opinion polls, said this week that Trump's stonewalling left no alternative but impeachment, which other Democrats have urged. A Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll showed the public split evenly over impeachment, with 40 percent in favor and 42 percent against it.

On the other hand, Trump's behavior may already be worrying Americans. A recent Reuters/Ipsos poll showed Trump with a 37 percent approval rating after the Mueller report's release, his lowest of the year. Any further erosion will likely be muted by the economy, which is churning along in its 10th year of expansion. But if economic growth were to falter, the stand-off in Washington could become a bigger issue ahead of the November 2020 election. — Reuters

Killer asteroid flattens NY in simulation exercise

COLLEGE PARK: After devastating the French Riviera in 2013, destroying Dhaka in 2015 and saving Tokyo in 2017, an international asteroid impact simulation ended Friday with its latest disaster-New York in ruins. Despite a simulated eight years of preparation, scientists and engineers tried but failed to deflect the killer asteroid. The exercise has become a regular event among the international community of "planetary defense" experts.

The latest edition began Monday near Washington, with the following alert: an asteroid roughly 100 to 300 meters in diameter had been spotted and according to rough calculations had a one percent chance of hitting the Earth on April 29, 2027. Each day during the conference, some 200 astronomers, engineers and emergency response specialists received new information, made decisions and awaited further updates from the organizers of the game, designed by a NASA aerospace engineer.

As fictional months ticked by in the simulation, the probability of the giant space rock crashing into Earth rose to 10 percent-and then to 100 percent. NASA launched a probe in 2021 to examine the threat up close. In December that year, astronomers confirmed it was headed straight to the Denver area and that the western US city would be destroyed. The major space powers of the United States, Europe, Russia, China and Japan decided to build six "kinetic impactors"-probes meant to hit the asteroid to change its trajectory.

It took time to build the impactors and wait for the right launch window. The impacts were set for August 2024. Three impactors managed to hit the asteroid. The main body was deflected, but a smaller fragment broke off and continued on a deadly path, this time towards the eastern US. Washington considered sending a nuclear bomb to deflect the 60-meter rock-repeating a successful strategy that saved Tokyo last year-but it was crippled by political disagreements. — AFP

Lost world: Report shows Nature at...

Continued from Page 1

40 percent of the world's people lack access even to clean drinking water. The inequality gap is huge and widening: GDP per head is already 50 times larger in wealthy nations than in poor ones.

Industrial fishing is destroying our oceans, according to the report. It found that 70,000 industrial fishing vessels operate in at least 55 percent of the world's high seas. Nearly three quarters of major marine fish stocks are depleted or exploited to the limit of sustainability, despite efforts from the fishing community to implement quotas and drive down overfishing.

On land, the situation looks even bleaker. A third of all land is now given over to agriculture and 75 percent of freshwater resources is dedicated to food production. In all, at least a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions come from land clearing, crop production and fertilization, the vast majority of which comes from animal-based food production.

Agribusiness expansion has also led to the disappearance of vast swathes of CO2-absorbing forests: Earth has lost 290 million hectares-around six percent-of its forests since 1990. Fertilizer use, which degrades the soil's ability to grow plants and suck in greenhouse gases, has risen four-fold in just 13 years in Asia and doubled worldwide in the same period.

Scientists estimate there to be roughly eight million species of plants and animals on Earth, though only a fraction of them have so far been identified. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) "Red List" catalogues some 100,000 species, around a quarter of which are classed as in danger of extinction. An IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) report goes much further, however, projecting that between 500,000 and one million species could face oblivion due to pollution and habitat degradation.

Its authors stress that whatever losses humans inflict on Nature will in turn be inflicted upon us. More than two billion people still rely on wood as their main energy source, and up to half of all medicines come from plants and animals. What's more, the world's oceans and forests absorb more than half of our greenhouse gas emissions, which are still climbing year on year. "At current trends, we risk drastic degradation, with drops in contributions critical for societies and uneven distribution of losses," the report states. "Basic needs and luxuries depend on Nature." — AFP

Boeing plane skids into Florida river

Continued from Page 1

said in a statement. However, there were fears for a number of pet animals travelling in the plane's luggage compartment. The pets had "not been retrieved yet due to safety issues with the aircraft," NAS Jacksonville said in an update on Facebook yesterday.

Images showed the Miami Air International plane lying partially submerged in water after the crash-landing, with its nose cone missing. Passengers in life vests were instructed to clamber onto the wings of the jet before being transported to shore aboard inflatable life rafts, Bormann said. "We couldn't tell where we were, a river or an ocean. There was rain coming down. There was lightning and thunder. We stood on that wing for a significant period of time," she told CNN.

Navy security and emergency response personnel including some 90 firefighters attended the scene. Jacksonville mayor Lenny Curry tweeted that the White House had called to offer assistance as the situation was developing. "All alive and accounted for. Our Fire and Rescue teams are family to all," said Curry. Teams were working to control jet fuel spilling into the St Johns River, he added. The "Rotator" flight from the US base in Cuba carries passengers including military personnel and family members.

The National Transportation Safety Board said yesterday a team was being sent to investigate the incident. Boeing said it was aware of the incident and providing technical assistance to the agency as it conducts its probe. The plane involved was a Boeing 737-800, in operation for 18 years, according to website FlightRadar24. US aerospace giant Boeing is under scrutiny following two crashes that killed a total of 346 passengers and crew and grounded its newer 737 MAX planes worldwide. Both a Lion Air crash in Indonesia in October, and March's Ethiopian Airlines crash outside Addis Ababa, occurred shortly after takeoff. — AFP

Thailand crowns king in ornate

Continued from Page 1

He was then carried in a palanquin surrounded by guards in lock-step to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha where he proclaimed himself the royal patron of Buddhism. Earlier his fourth wife, Suthida-married in a surprise ceremony days before the coronation-was invested as Queen, kneeling in respect in front of her husband who sat on a throne. For most Thais, it is the first time they have witnessed a coronation-the last was in 1950 for the king's beloved father Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Hundreds of state officials in immaculate white uniforms lined the streets around the Grand Palace, outnumbering the modest number of civilians braving the hot sun for the royal convoy. "I'm really happy and proud," said Pornthip Pongsai, who travelled hours from a province to catch a glimpse. Bangkok city official Anusara Chuensuang expressed wonder at the having a chance to see "such a special ceremony", adding that the king is "our heart".

The $31 million coronation continues today with the king appearing in a hours-long procession along a seven kilometer route twisting through the old city. Bhumibol was seen as a figure of unity in the politically chaotic kingdom until his death in October 2016. His son Vajiralongkorn, 66, is less well-known to the Thai public, spending time overseas and rarely addressing his subjects. Fiercely private and four times married, he has inherited one of the world's richest monarchies and a kingdom submerged by political crisis.

Thailand has been run by an arch-royalist junta since 2014. Rama X is widely seen as an adroit player of Thailand's treacherous politics, intervening several times-including in the March 24 election-during his short reign. Those elections are yet to yield a new government, with the kingdom split between pro and anti-junta blocs. Full results are due to be announced next week with the ruling junta tipped to return as the civilian government.

"The coronation distracts from the popular indignation regarding election irregularities," said Thai politics expert Paul Chambers of Naresuan University. Prayut, who led the 2014 coup, also participated in one of the key morning rituals when the king received sacred water from eight directions, representing all the sides of the kingdom. Also present at the ceremonies were his 14-year-old son from his third marriage-Prince Dipangkorn-and his elder sister Ubolratana, who was taking selfies.

She stunned Thailand in February when her name was forwarded as a candidate for premier by an anti-junta party-a move swiftly shot down by her brother in a royal command. Harsh lese-majeste laws mean unguarded discussion about the monarchy inside Thailand is virtually impossible. Born on July 28, 1952, the British-schooled Vajiralongkorn is known for his love of cycling and piloting jets, but he spends much of his time abroad-mainly in Germany-and remains something of a mystery to many Thais. — AFP

Gaza-Israel hostilities flare...

Continued from Page 1

shrapnel in the city of Kiryat Gat. Many of the missiles were intercepted, the military said. The flare-up, which prompted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to convene his security council, comes days before Muslims begin the holy month of Ramadan and Israelis celebrate Independence Day. Israel is also due to host the 2019 Eurovision song contest finals in less than two weeks in Tel Aviv, towards which long-range rockets were launched in mid-March.

Although Israeli air strikes in retaliation for rockets from Gaza are a frequent occurrence, Israel and Hamas have managed to avert all-out war for the past five years. Egyptian mediators, credited with brokering a ceasefire after a Hamas rocket attack north of Tel Aviv in March triggered a burst of intense fighting, have been working to prevent any further escalation of hostilities. Netanyahu met security chiefs yesterday to discuss the situation, a source in his office said.

Hamas would "continue to respond to the crimes by the occupation and it will not allow it to shed the blood of our people," its spokesman Abdel-Latif Al-Qanoua said in a statement yesterday. He made no explicit claim for Hamas having fired the rockets. One of the attacks was claimed by the Palestinian Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which said it fired rockets at the Israeli city of Ashkelon. The Islamic Jihad said in a statement that the rocket barrages were a response to Friday's events and that Israel has been delaying the implementation of previous understandings brokered by Cairo.

Hamas said on Thursday that its Gaza chief, Yeyha Sinwar, had travelled to Cairo for talks on efforts to maintain calm along the border and alleviate hardship in the enclave. Some 2 million Palestinians live in Gaza, whose economy has suffered years of blockades as well as recent foreign aid cuts. Unemployment stands at 52 percent, according to the World Bank, and poverty is rampant. Israel says its blockade is necessary to stop weapons reaching Hamas, with which it has fought three wars since the group seized control of Gaza in 2007. — Reuters

Giants escape 8-run hole, top Reds in 11 innings

Muncy lifts Dodgers to 4-3 win over Padres

CINCINNATI: Evan Longoria belted a homer to lead off the 11th inning, and the visiting San Francisco Giants overcame an eight-run deficit to post a 12-11 victory over the Cincinnati Reds on Friday. After striking out a pair of batters in a scoreless 10th inning, Jared Hughes (2-1) saw his 0-1 slider to Longoria deposited just inside the left field foul pole to begin the 11th. The blast capped San Francisco's comeback from an 8-0 deficit, highlighted by Stephen Vogt's game-tying homer off closer Raisel Iglesias with two outs in the ninth inning. Joe Panik launched a two-run homer, and Steven Duggar and Brandon Belt each had a two-run single for the Giants, who overcame a pair of three-run homers by Derek Dietrich to snap a seven-game losing streak in Cincinnati.

DODGERS 4, PADRES 3

Max Muncy drove home Austin Barnes with a single off the glove of San Diego first baseman Eric Hosmer in the ninth inning to give visiting Los Angeles a win. The Dodgers rallied from a 3-0 deficit that the Padres built when Manny Machado and Ian Kinsler homered off Clayton Kershaw. Scott Alexander (2-1) retired the only hitter he faced to get the win. Kenley Jansen picked up his 11th save with three strikeouts in the bottom of the ninth. Kirby Yates (0-1), who was the National League Reliever of the Month for April after recording 14 saves in as many chances, took the loss.

BLUE JAYS 1, RANGERS 0 (12 INNINGS)

Trent Thornton allowed one hit over seven shutout innings, and Toronto eventually beat Texas in Arlington, Texas. Thornton is still seeking his first win after striking out five and walking two in his seventh major league start. Rangers left-hander Mike Minor threw eight shutout innings. He scattered seven hits, struck out nine and walked two. Texas' Ariel Jurado (0-1) took over in the 12th and gave up a leadoff single to Brandon Drury. Teoscar Hernandez then singled to center and Danny Jansen laid down a two-strike bunt back to Jurado, who threw the ball away trying to retire Drury at third, scoring the only run.

CUBS 4, CARDINALS 0

Kyle Hendricks threw a shutout on 81 pitches to lift Chicago past the visiting Cardinals, allowing four hits and striking out three without walking a batter in the opener of the three-game series. It was his third major league shutout and first since a 5-0 win against the Miami Marlins on Aug. 1, 2016. Anthony Rizzo hit a three-run homer among his three hits for Chicago, which has won five in a row, the past two by shutout. St. Louis starter Jack Flaherty (3-2) pitched 5 2/3 innings, allowing three runs and four hits with nine strikeouts and a season-high four walks.

BRAVES 7, MARLINS 2

In a tension-filled game, Atlanta pitcher Kevin Gausman was ejected in the second inning, but the Braves rallied to defeat host Miami led by Brian McCann, who homered and had three RBIs. Freddie Freeman also homered, and Josh Donaldson-in his first game back from a calf injury-went 3-for-5 with a double and three RBIs. Gausman was apparently seeking retribution against Marlins pitcher Jose Urena (1-5), who hit Braves star Ronald Acuna in the elbow last year. This was the first time since then that the Braves had faced Urena, and Gausman threw a 97 mph fastball behind his knees with his first pitch, earning an immediate ejection. Touki Toussaint (2-0), who entered the game in the second inning after Gausman was ejected and inherited a two-on jam, earned the win in his first game since being recalled from Triple-A Gwinnett. He allowed one run in four innings, striking out six.

ATHLETICS 14, PIRATES 1

Josh Phegley had a career-high eight RBIs as visiting Oakland broke out of a six-game losing streak in a big way, shellacking Pittsburgh. Phegley hit a solo homer, two bases-clearing doubles and an RBI single. It was the most RBIs against Pittsburgh since St. Louis' Kenny Reitz had eight on June 28, 1977. Oakland starter Brett Anderson (4-2) allowed one run and four hits in six innings with four strikeouts and two walks. Pittsburgh starter Joe Musgrove (1-3) lasted 2 2/3 innings, giving up seven runs, five of them earned, and six hits with one strikeout and two walks.

BREWERS 3, METS 1

Ryan Braun hit a tiebreaking two-run homer in the fifth inning for host Milwaukee, which went on to beat New York in the opener of a three-game series. Braun finished 3-for-4 for the Brewers, who snapped a two-game losing streak. The Mets have alternated losses with wins over the past seven games. The teams traded runs in the first inning, but the Brewers stranded five runners over the next four innings before finally cashing in against Steven Matz (3-2) in the fifth, when Yasmani Grandal drew a leadoff walk and Braun followed with a homer. That helped make a winner out of Brandon Woodruff (4-1), who allowed the one run on six hits and two walks while striking out seven over five innings.

DIAMONDBACKS 10, ROCKIES 9

Ketel Marte homered twice, Adam Jones and Eduardo Escobar also went deep, and visiting Arizona beat Colorado in Denver. Marte finished with four RBIs and three hits, and Jones and Escobar also had three hits for Arizona. Ryan McMahon and Charlie Blackmon homered, and Nolan Arenado had three hits for Colorado. The Rockies nearly rallied from four down in the ninth. Blackmon hit a two-run homer to make it 10-8, and then Colorado loaded the bases with no outs off Greg Holland. David Dahl drove in one run with a fielder's choice, but Holland struck out Ian Desmond and Chris Iannetta to earn his eighth save.

RAYS 7, ORIOLES 0

Tyler Glasnow pitched seven innings, Mike Zunino hit a three-run homer, and visiting Tampa Bay beat Baltimore in the opener of a three-game series. Glasnow, the American League Pitcher of the Month for April, improved to 6-0 while allowing three hits and striking out eight without a walk. The 25-year-old lowered his AL-leading ERA to 1.47 as the Rays topped the Orioles. Glasnow matched his longest outing of the season. All five Baltimore hits were singles, and the Orioles didn't get a runner to second base. Tommy Pham had three hits and drove in two runs for the Rays, and Brandon Lowe, Avisail Garcia and Willy Adames each had two hits. The Rays totaled 12 hits and six walks.



CINCINNATI: Derek Dietrich #22 of the Cincinnati Reds hits a three-run home run in the first inning against the San Francisco Giants at Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati, Ohio.—AFP

YANKEES 6, TWINS 3

Gary Sanchez homered in consecutive at-bats, but host New York lost starting pitcher James Paxton to left knee soreness in a win over Minnesota. Sanchez opened the fifth by hitting a 2-1 fastball from Kyle Gibson (2-1) into the left field seats to give the Yankees a 5-1 lead. Sanchez then homered with two outs in the seventh on a 2-2 fastball from Mike Morin, giving the Yankees catcher 10 home runs this season. Sanchez's homers occurred on a night when Paxton became the latest Yankees player to be injured. He exited after the third inning, and the Yankees said he was headed for an MRI exam yesterday.

RED SOX 6, WHITE SOX 1

Chris Sale struck out 10 batters in six shutout innings to earn his first victory of the season, and Rafael Devers backed him with a three-run home run as visiting Boston topped Chicago. Facing the club with which he spent the first seven seasons of his career, Sale (1-5) emerged victorious in his seventh start of the season. The left-hander scattered three hits and one walk while throwing 70 of his 104 pitches for strikes to help Boston to its fourth win in five games. Devers delivered the only offense Boston needed, smacking his first home run of the season with two on and two outs in the first inning. Red Sox rookie Michael Chavis hit a two-run homer in the sixth.

PHILLIES 4, NATIONALS 2

Rhys Hoskins hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the sixth inning, and Jerad Eickhoff and four relievers shut down a decimated Washington lineup as host Philadelphia won. The Nationals are now 1-9 in the first game of a series this year. Hector Neris pitched the ninth for his fifth save while the Phillies won for the fifth time in six games. Neris fanned Michael A. Taylor for the last out with a runner on. The winning rally started as Jean Segura reached on an infield single with one out in the sixth, and Bryce Harper followed with a walk against his former team. Hoskins then hit a 1-1 pitch from Dan Jennings (0-1) well over the fence in left.

INDIANS 2, MARINERS 1

Pinch hitter Tyler Naquin grounded a run-scoring single into right field with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning to give Cleveland the victory against visiting Seattle, which took its fifth straight defeat. Francisco Lindor led off the bottom of the ninth by walking on four pitches from Mariners right-hander Anthony Swarzak (2-1). Leonys Martin hit a slow roller to second baseman Dee Gordon that turned into a fielder's choice, with Lindor out at second. Jose Ramirez was caught looking at a called third strike before Carlos Santana walked, moving Martin to second. After a conference on the mound, Naquin swung at the first pitch he saw from Swarzak and grounded it out of the reach of Gordon, allowing Martin to score easily. Brad Hand (1-1) pitched a scoreless inning of relief for the victory.

TIGERS 4, ROYALS 3

Miguel Cabrera had three hits and an RBI, Matthew Boyd (3-2) struck out nine over seven innings, and host Detroit held off Kansas City. Ronny Rodriguez had two hits, a run and two RBIs for the Tigers, while Nicholas Castellanos scored twice. Shane Greene recorded his 13th save in as many opportunities despite allowing a Jorge Soler homer. Soler paced Kansas City's attack with three hits and two RBIs. Jorge Lopez (0-3) gave up four runs on five hits in seven innings. — Reuters

Hebert's back nine 28 seizes China Open lead

SHENZHEN: Benjamin Hebert of France carded a "crazy" back nine in 28 shots yesterday to seize control of the 25th Volvo China Open in Shenzhen as overnight leader Wu Ashun wobbled.

The Frenchman, who had started on nine-under after his first two rounds, seemed out of sorts as he reached the turn in level par for the day after a bogey at the ninth and was six shots adrift of Wu.

But three birdies in the next four holes moved him up the leaderboard before a spectacular birdie, birdie, eagle, birdie finish saw him open a three-stroke advantage at Genzon Golf Club in Shenzhen.

"That's golf. What a crazy game!" he told AFP. "I played very badly in the front nine. I didn't feel very well in my swing. "I just tried to keep focused on what I'm doing and I found my rhythm so I'm happy."

The best-of-the-week round of eight-under 64 took the 32-year-old to 17-under par for the tournament Finland's Mikko Korhonen, who shot 65, and last week's Morocco winner Jorge Campillo (68) are sharing second on 14-under.

"I have been patient, I was patient all day today and I'll try to keep up tomorrow," said Korhonen. "It might be a wet day so patience will be the key once again." In-form Campillo won on the European Tour for the first time a week ago and is firmly in the hunt for back-to-back triumphs. "I hope to use my experience from last week to win," Campillo said. "But if Benjamin plays like he did today, then it's tough. Hopefully I have a chance." Hebert will seek his maiden European Tour victory when he goes out in the final group with Korhonen and Campillo at 9:21 am local time (0121 GMT) Sunday in an early start forced by the threat of storms later in the day.

"It's my first time leading after 54 holes and we'll see," said Hebert. "It's going to be a very early start so hopefully we'll have some good conditions."

Wu's hunt for a second Volvo China Open crown had started brilliantly with a tap-in birdie after almost holing his approach shot to the first. He made further gains at the eighth and the 10th and at that stage looked untouchable as his lead extended to four shots.

But a wayward tee shot on the par-three 12th produced his first blemish when he failed to get up and down and it precipitated a run of four consecutive bogeys as his lead evaporated to the groans of the huge home galleries tracking his every move.—AFP



PARIS: Petronas Yamaha SRT's French rider Fabio Quartararo (C) celebrates after earning the pole position for tomorrow's race with second placed Petronas Yamaha SRT' Italian rider Franco Morbidelli (L) and third placed Repsol Honda Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez during the MotoGP qualifying session of the Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez - Angel Nieto circuit in Jerez de la Frontera yesterday. —AFP

Quartararo tops Jerez qualifying to become youngest pole sitter

PARIS: Frenchman Fabio Quartararo snatched the first MotoGP pole position of his career when he edged Yamaha-SRT teammate Franco Morbidelli at Jerez yesterday. At 20 years and 14 days old, Quartararo became the youngest rider ever to take pole in MotoGP, breaking the record held by Marc Marquez who was 20 years and 62 days old when he won pole in the GP of the Americas in 2013.

World champion Marquez was third fastest yesterday, to complete the front row of the Jerez grid. "It's incredible," said Quartararo who is in his rookie season in the top division of motorcycling. "It was an enormous lap. I was on the limit all the way round. This circuit is fantastic and it's truly my greatest achievement."

After three races, Quartararo is 10th in the MotoGP standings. The two young riders on the Yamaha satellite outfit eclipsed their elders on the lead Yamaha team. Spaniard Maverick Vinales qualified fifth, while on the other factory Yamaha, Italian veteran Valentino Rossi who is second in the overall standings, was 13th fastest.

The second row on the starting grid will be made up of world championship leader Andrea Dovizioso on a Ducati, Vinales and Cal Crutchlow on a Honda. Earlier Italian Danilo Petrucci on a Ducati recorded the fastest time in free practice and became the first man to ever lap the recently resurfaced Jerez track in under 1min 37sec, breaking the record held by Crutchlow. The morning session was briefly halted after Crutchlow crashed and hit the air fence on Turn 10. The Briton was unhurt but the fence punctured and deflated. — AFP

Olympic chief sympathises with Semenya

SYDNEY: Olympic chief Thomas Bach said yesterday he had sympathy for Caster Semenya but respected the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)'s decision that means the South African athlete will have to reduce her testosterone levels to compete.

Semenya won gold in the 800 metres at the last two Olympics but Wednesday's CAS ruling means she will have to artificially reduce her levels of the hormone to defend her titles in Tokyo next year.

"First of all I must say I have a lot of sympathy for Caster Semenya over this decision," the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president said at the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) annual general meeting.

"Having said this, the issue as such is extremely complex. It has scientific impact, it has ethical impact, it impacts on 'fair play' in competition so it's extremely delicate and it's extremely difficult to do justice to all these (elements).

"What the IOC have been doing is trying to assist the international federations because it is they who have to take the decision because it is their rules. "The IOC respects CAS decisions, as we always do ... but from a human point of view, yes, I have sympathy for her."

The governing International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), who control the rules of competition in track and field at the Olympics, have imposed the conditions on female athletes with differences in sexual development (DSDs).

They cover track events ranging from 400 metres to a mile and Semenya has already indicated that she will not take medication to reduce her levels of testosterone, which increases muscle mass, strength and haemoglobin.

Bach said an IOC working group would examine the full CAS ruling once it was available, including recommendations from the panel of judges on how the rules should be implemented. The World Medical Association (WMA) on Friday called on its members not to implement the regulations, saying there was "weak evidence" that they were necessary and that they should be scrapped.

"This is why we have this working group, where there are also medical experts," Bach added. "They try, as we always try in these situations, to come to what scientists call a consensus. This is what they are working on. I am not a medical expert so I cannot comment on the (WMA) statement. I have to rely on the experts.—Reuters

Blazers pull out four OT win in longest NBA playoff game since 1953

Bucks blow past Celtics for 2-1 series edge

LOS ANGELES: CJ McCollum delivered 41 points as the Portland Trail Blazers edged the Denver Nuggets 140-137 in four overtimes Friday in the longest NBA playoff game in 66 years. The game featured 24 lead changes but the Blazers came out on top to take a 2-1 lead in the second round Western Conference series.

"I have never been involved a game like that in regular season or playoffs," said Trail Blazers coach Terry Stotts. "It was an amazing effort by both teams." It was just the second quadruple-overtime playoff game in NBA history, joining a 1953 game between the Boston Celtics and the Syracuse Nationals.

Damian Lillard added 28 points for Portland who can go up 3-1 with a victory in game four at home on Sunday. "That was the craziest game I have ever been a part of," said Lillard. Jamal Murray scored 34 points, and Nikola Jokic collected 33 points, 18 rebounds and 14 assists for the Nuggets, who used their inside game to keep the score close in the extra sessions.

"We fought, we fought, we fought. That's all you can ask for. It was a hell of basketball game by two very good basketball teams," said Denver coach Mike Malone. McCollum played over 60 minutes and connected on 16 of 39 field goals as he went on a run in the fourth quarter and the beginning of the first overtime. He said he wasn't tired.

"This is what I am built for," said McCollum. "This is why I condition all summer. That is why I work on my diet. That is why I get my sleep and my massages. "This is what we live for. We got to get some sleep and take advantage of our time. They are coming off a seven game series and so we will see them in a couple of days." Jokic also logged massive minutes, playing a historic 65, the most ever by a seven footer in the playoffs. Will Barton made one of two free throws, giving Denver a 134-133 lead with one minute left in the fourth overtime. Rodney Hood's baseline jumper then put Portland in front 135-134 with 44 seconds to go.

Paul Millsap's layup gave the Nuggets into a 136-135 lead with 27 seconds to play. Hood nailed a shot from beyond the arc to give Portland a 138-136 lead with 17 seconds remaining. Jokic had a chance to tie it but missed one of two free throws to make it 138-137 with five seconds on the clock. Portland's Seth Curry then nailed a pair of clutch free throws for a 140-137 lead with 2.8 seconds left. Denver's feeble attempt at a long inbounds pass was intercepted and the clock ran out.

Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 32 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to lead Milwaukee to a 123-116 victory in Boston that put the Bucks 2-1 up in their playoff series against the Celtics.

The top-seeded Bucks scored 40 points in the third quarter and pulled away for a victory that saw them regain home-court advantage in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference second round series, in which they were stung at home in game one.

'STAY AGGRESSIVE'

"I'm just trusting myself, I just have confidence in myself," said Milwaukee's Most Valuable Player candidate Antetokounmpo. "That's what my teammates want me to do. "They want me to stay aggressive, they want me to make the right play-that's what I'm going to keep doing the whole series."

Boston led 56-55 at halftime, leading by as many as 12 before the Bucks battled back to narrow the gap. Milwaukee's 40 third-quarter points were the most scored by either team in a single period in the series.

They connected on 11 of 18 from the field with Milwaukee guard George Hill draining a pair of three-pointers in a 12-0 scoring run. Boston scored 31 points in the period, but Milwaukee held the Celtics without a field goal in the final 3:44 of the quarter-then opened the fourth on an 11-3 scoring run, stretching their lead to as many as 17 points.

The Celtics again cut the deficit to single digits, Al Horford's three-pointer with 10.6 seconds left pulling Boston within 116-121. But Antetokounmpo, who scored half his points at the free throw line, made two last foul shots to close it out. Antetokounmpo added eight assists and three blocked shots. Hill connected on nine of 12 from the field to score 21 off the bench and Khris Middleton added 20 points for the Bucks. Kyrie Irving led Boston with 29 points. — AFP



PORTLAND: Jamal Murray #27 of the Denver Nuggets drives to the basket on Enes Kanter #00 of the Portland Trail Blazers during the second overtime of game three of the Western Conference Semifinals at Moda Center in Portland, Oregon. — AFP

Ireland captain Porterfield unhappy with Foakes stumping

LONDON: Ireland captain William Porterfield has blasted England's Ben Foakes for his delayed stumping of Andrew Balbirnie during England's one-day-international win in Dublin, saying matches could last "15 hours" if every wicket-keeper waited as long to try to effect a dismissal.

Balbirnie was on 29 at the Malahide ground on Friday when he missed an intended sweep off spinner Joe Denly. Foakes gathered a wide delivery down the legside but, rather than whip the bails off immediately, he waited for Balbirnie to raise his back foot slightly-thereby making the batsman out of his ground-before breaking the stumps. Third umpire Aleem Dar gave Balbirnie out after studying television replays, despite Porterfield convinced the appeal should have been dismissed as the delay meant the ball was "pretty much dead". "How long do you wait? We'll be playing 15-hour games if you wait that long," Porterfield said. "You can say it was great wicketkeeping or you can say it's a bit of a grey area of how long he takes.

"The ball was pretty much dead. The batsman wasn't going anywhere or overbalanced. It wasn't like he had fallen over. "The keeper has waited for three or four seconds, if we do that all day it's going be a pretty long game." The move divided pundits, with some saying that it went against the spirit of cricket, but one-day international debutant Foakes had a different view. "It was quite wide down leg, but I got it back to the stumps," he said. "When it's a sweep you think they might fall over and I just saw he lifted his foot and nicked them off."

Ireland were eventually dismissed for 198 but then reduced England to 66 for five before man-of-the-match Foakes struck an unbeaten 61 to help see the visitors to a four-wicket win.

But it was his stumping rather than his batting that provoked plenty of debate, with former county bowler turned international broadcaster Alan Wilkins urging the International Cricket Council to take action.

"If the @ICC wishes to maintain its 'Spirit of Cricket' as part of the modern game, then the Ben Foakes 'stumping' in Malahide today should not be endorsed as 'within the Spirit of the Game'," Wilkins said on Twitter. But there are many who feel the uncertainty surrounding what the 'Spirit of Cricket' means, as opposed to the precise nature of the sport's rulebook or Laws, makes the concept more trouble than it's worth. Former England fast-medium bowler Mike Selvey, a long-serving cricket journalist, responded to Wilkins by tweeting: "The 'Spirit' doesn't exist Wilko. "It's an abstract concept that means only what an individual wants it to mean." — AFP

'Surprise package': Pakistan's 150kph teen with WCup in his sights

KARACHI: Four years ago, two-time World Cup winner Steve Waugh predicted young fast bowler Mohammad Hasnain would one day make a name for himself on the international stage.

Now the 19-year-old can prove Waugh right after his blistering pace earned him a call-up to Pakistan's squad for the World Cup. Pakistan's chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq, a member of the country's first and only victorious World Cup squad in 1992, called the young bowler a "surprise package", while legendary paceman Waqar Younis says he sees shades of himself in the ultra-quick, destructive teen.

Tall and with a wide smile, Hasnain has turned heads after first arriving on the national scene in 2015 and sending down balls at a blistering 150kph (93 mph). Hasnain's rise to Pakistan's senior squad has been similarly rapid-he made his one-day international debut within a week of leading the Quetta Gladiators to the Pakistan Super League (PSL) title. "It's a great honour to represent Pakistan and the honour multiplied when I was named in the World Cup squad," Hasnain told AFP. "I am on cloud nine and ready to make batsmen struggle with my speed. I love to bowl fast and that is my strong point."

Hasnain made his way to the international stage from the dusty pitches of sun-bleached Hyderabad in southern Pakistan, where he was mentored by renowned cricketing coach Iqbal Imam. "Hasnain played Under-16 and Under-19 for Hyderabad and right from the start his pace has been impressive," recalled Imam, a former first-class cricketer who had played alongside Inzamam.

In 2015, he was selected in Pakistan's Under-15 team to tour Australia. "I remember that at the Bradman ground near Sydney, Steve Waugh came to watch his son Austin and he saw Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasnain in action. He predicted that the two boys will make an impact at the international level," said former coach Mohammad Masroor.

Shaheen played for Pakistan in all three formats last year and is also in the World Cup squad, meaning both players can now seize their opportunity at the tournament in England and Wales. He could also feature in today's one-off T20 clash against England in Cardiff.

'SHIVERS DOWN YOUR SPINE'

Soon after his 12 wickets in the PSL's fourth edition, Hasnain was picked to play for Pakistan against Australia in a one-day series in the United Arab Emirates.

Although he took just two wickets in three games, Australian batsmen were troubled by his pace-a trait Pakistan's head coach Mickey Arthur said could be a game-changer for his squad.

"His pace is the most impressive and he has the potential of an international player," said Arthur.

"He could be the X-factor for us." Former great Waqar also lauded Hasnain's pace, as well as his grit. "He is very talented, has pace and bounce and the determination," said Waqar. "I have told him not to lose his pace, which is his strong point. I wish him the best of luck."—AFP

Afridi casts doubt on age record in new autobiography

KARACHI: When Pakistan's Shahid Afridi smashed a 37-ball century against Sri Lanka in 1996, he not only registered the fastest-ever one-day ton, he also became the youngest player to score 100 runs in an international.

Or did he?

In a new autobiography, the fiery all-rounder says he was aged 19 when he blasted onto the world stage with his record-breaking innings, and not 16 as history suggests. "For the record, I was just nineteen, and not sixteen like they claim," he writes in "Game Changer", which went on sale this week.

"I was born in 1975. So, yes, the authorities stated my age incorrectly." Confusingly, if he was born in 1975, it would mean he was either 20 or 21 at the time. Wisden, the sport's recognised almanac, still lists Afridi as the youngest player to score a one-day ton-aged 16 years and 217 days-but his fastest-century record lasted until 2014 when it was eclipsed by New Zealander Corey Anderson, and by South African AB de Villiers a year later. Cricket experts and fans have long questioned the purported ages of various Asian players-particularly in junior competitions-and Afridi's revelation will only fuel the controversy.

In the weeks leading up to his record-breaking Pakistan debut, Afridi had been playing in an international under-19 tournament in the West Indies. Pakistan cricket authorities claimed Hasan Raza was 14 years old when he made his Test debut against Zimbabwe in 1996, but Wisden doesn't recognise that claim.

The age controversy is just one of many in Afridi's book, in which he lays into former team mates with no holds barred-calling Javed Miandad, Pakistan's most successful Test batsman, "a small man".

"He hated the way I batted," writes Afridi of the 1999 India tour, accusing Miandad of not giving him batting practice before the Chennai Test in which he scored a century to help Pakistan to a 12-run victory.

"Javed's attitude towards me touched a new low. Before the post-match ceremony, he pulled me aside and said 'Listen, buddy, you'd better make sure you thank me in the presentation'. I couldn't believe it. "That day I lost all my respect for Javed Miandad, supposedly one of the greats of the game but in reality, a small man."

Afridi described another team mate, Waqar Younis, as a mediocre captain and terrible coach. He said Imran Khan, a former captain and now prime minister of Pakistan, had an "abrasive style leadership". "By the way, they say that Khan... runs his cabinet the same way," he added.

Afridi heaped praise on the late Bob Woolmer, however, the Englishman who coached Pakistan during his best years. "I can safely say that the only coach who gave me that kind of support was Woolmer. My batting stats were better under him," he writes. He described former Indian opener Gautam Gambhir, with whom he clashed on-field in 2007, as "a burn out who had attitude problems". "I remember that run-in with him in 2007 tour when he completed a single while running straight into me. The umpires had to finish it off or I would have," he said. "Clearly we had a frank bilateral discussion about each other's female relatives." — AFP



KARACHI: File photo shows, Pakistani cricketer of Multan Sultans Shahid Afridi (L) plays a shot during the third match between the Lahore Qalandars and Multan Sultans of the last eight matches of the Twenty20 Pakistan Super League (PSL). — AFP

Salt replaces injured Malan in England squad for Pakistan T20

LONDON: Uncapped Sussex batsman Phil Salt has been added to England's squad for today's Twenty20 international against Pakistan following Dawid Malan's withdrawal through injury. Middlesex's Malan suffered a groin problem while batting during England's unconvincing four-wicket win away to Ireland in a lone one-day international on Friday and will now miss the one-off T20 in Cardiff.

Welsh-born Salt, 22 has made just the four fifties in 35 T20 matches but a strike-rate of 151.50 has put him on the radar of England's selectors. This season Salt has make an unbeaten 137 off just 106 balls for Sussex against Kent in the 50-over One-Day Cup.

Salt, who spent part of his childhood in Barbados, has also played for Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League. Salt joins a growing list from players outside England's provisional squad for the 50-over World Cup to be called up in the early stages of the international season.

Just seven those who travel to Cardiff's Sophia Gardens were named in last month's preliminary 15 by the tournament hosts. Several others have been rested, rotated, or, in the case of Alex Hales, dropped. The Nottinghamshire batsman reportedly failed a second test for recreational drug use. — AFP

Celtic win eighth successive Scottish Premiership title

Lennon is yet to be handed the job on a permanent basis

LONDON: Celtic remain in a league of their own in Scotland as a 3-0 win at Aberdeen clinched an eighth consecutive Premiership title yesterday. The Hoops are now just one victory away from a third consecutive domestic treble of trophies should they defeat Hearts in the Scottish Cup final on May 25.

However, that haul of silverware belies a troubled campaign that saw manager Brendan Rodgers walk out on the club to move to Leicester and a repeated failure to make progress in Europe.

Neil Lennon returned for his second spell in charge when Rodgers suddenly upped sticks in February and has steadied the ship with an unbeaten 11-game run to extend Celtic's eight-point lead over Rangers to 12, although Steven Gerrard's men have a game in hand. Yet, despite the results, Celtic's performances have not hit the heights they often did under Rodgers in the past three months with Lennon admitting his side gave him "heebee jeebees" in closing out the title.

Lennon is yet to be handed the job on a permanent basis and uncertainty surrounds not only who will be in the dugout next season, but the futures of much of a bloated squad.

"It's been really tough, the toughest piece of management I've had to do," added Lennon. "It has been difficult coming in to the club but the players helped me and I like to think I've helped them. It's been really special." There is little time for the Celtic board to deliberate when it comes to naming a new manager or in the transfer market as the Scottish champions will again have to trawl through four qualifying rounds to make it back to the riches and glamour of the Champions League. Failure at the third hurdle against AEK Athens last season curtailed Rodgers's ambition for the club to kick on and saw star striker Moussa Dembele sold to Lyon on the final day of the transfer window. Lennon is the hot favourite for the role given his experience of the club and Scottish football, plus he was the last man to lead Celtic to the last 16 of the Champions League in 2013. The recent deaths of legendary former captain Billy McNeill, who lifted the European Cup in 1967, and Stevie Chalmers, who scored the winning goal against Inter Milan in that final, have hammered home how far off Celtic seem from the European elite now compared to their glorious past.

Emulating the Lisbon Lions on the continental stage is an impossible task, but matching them domestically is Celtic's target for next season.

McNeill and Chalmers played their part in the Celtic side that won nine titles in a row between 1965-1974, a feat that Rangers matched in the late eighties and nineties. Now nine-in-a-row beckons again for Celtic and Lennon, despite his combustible nature, is seen as the safest pair of hands to get them there.

Gerrard's first season at Ibrox has seen steady if unspectacular progress. Rangers will finish second for the first time since the club went into liquidation in 2012 and the Gers will hope to be in a better position to push Celtic closer again next season.

However, that will depend on how willingly and wisely Celtic invest. Celtic's most recent financial results in February showed cash reserves of £39 million ($51 million), a huge sum in the small pond of Scottish football. Use it to good effect during a summer of transition and Celtic's financial muscle should see them swot the competition aside again next season. — AFP



ABERDEEN: Celtic players celebrate after the final whistle of their Scottish Premiership soccer match against Aberdeen at Pittodrie Stadium, Aberdeen, Scotland, yesterday.

'Phenomenon' Ronaldo stretches Torino's 24-year wait for win at Juventus

TURIN: Cristiano Ronaldo headed in a late equaliser to spoil Torino's dream of a first win at city rivals Juventus in nearly a quarter of a century on Friday and frustrate their bid to move into the Champions League places.

Sasa Lukic had fired Torino ahead after 17 minutes in a match brought forward a day to avoid clashing with Saturday's 70th anniversary of the air disaster that wiped out the all-conquering 'Grande Torino' team of the 1940s.

But Ronaldo headed in for 1-1 after 84 minutes to leave Torino in sixth place, two points off the Champions League berths with three games left to play. Juventus have already sealed the Serie A title for the eighth season in a row, but Torino still have all to play for as they target a first-ever qualification for elite European competition.

"This draw burns, we could have scored a second goal and brought the win home," said Torino coach Walter Mazzarri. "The only time we let down our guard the phenomenon that is Ronaldo punished us."

Torino have not won at Juventus since 1995 while their only win since then against their city rivals was at home in April 2015. Ronaldo-who had scored the only goal with a penalty in the reverse fixture in December-was partnered up front by teenage striker Moise Kean.

Kean threatened early along with Torino captain Andrea Belotti. But Serbian midfielder Lukic broke through following a Miralem Pjanic error to slot in his first goal for Torino. Ronaldo came close to an equaliser soon after with his powerful strike just wide with Salvatore Sirigu denying Blaise Matuidi.

But Juventus increased the pressure after the break with Ronaldo rising hightest to latch onto a Leonardo Spinazzola cross to beat Sirigu and deny Torino a third consecutive victory.

It was Ronaldo's 21st league goal this season and moves him two behind Sampdoria's Fabio Quagliarella, who leads the Serie A scoring charts. The Portuguese superstar brings his tally of career club goals to 601, edging ahead of his Argentina rival Lionel Messi, who has 600. "We're lucky to play with Cristiano and live in this age of two star players," said Juventus captain Giorgio Chiellini. "They're somewhat comparable to (Roger) Federer and (Rafael) Nadal. They are both out of this world, one seems stronger one day and then the other replies."

For Juventus it was a second consecutive stalemate after last weekend's 1-1 draw against Inter Milan. "Clearly once you've won the league the foot comes off the gas a little bit and it becomes difficult to find the motivation," said coach Massimiliano Allegri.

"But compared to the San Siro we started better and if we hadn't conceded that goal in the first half it might have been a different game." Juventus are nevertheless 19 points ahead of second-placed Napoli, who host Cagliari today.

Inter Milan, eight points behind Napoli, will look to consolidate third position and their Champions League berth at Udinese. Torino stay sixth, one point behind Roma, and two adrift of fourth-placed Atalanta.

Although Juventus have nothing left to play for they will have a role in who qualifies for next seasons Champions League as they play Roma and Atalanta in their next two games. — AFP

Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Huddersfield v Manchester United	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
Chelsea FC v Watford	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
Arsenal v Brighton & Hove Albion	18:30
beIN SPORTS	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Getafe CF v Girona	13:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
SD Eibar v Real Betis	15:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Real Madrid CF v Villarreal CF	17:15
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Real Valladolid v Athletic de Bilbao	19:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Huesca v Valencia C.F	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 3	

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Empoli v ACF Fiorentina	13:30
beIN SPORTS	
SS Lazio v Atalanta	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
Parma Calcio 1913 v UC Sampdoria	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
US Sassuolo Calcio v Frosinone Calcio	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
Genoa CFC v AS Roma	19:00
beIN SPORTS	
SSC Napoli v Cagliari Calcio	21:30
beIN SPORTS	

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Schalke 04 v FC Augsburg	14:30
beIN SPORTS	
SC Freiburg v Fortuna Dusseldorf	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Eintracht Frankfurt	19:00
beIN SPORTS	

FRENCH LEAGUE

Montpellier HSC v Amiens SC	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
FC Nantes v Dijon	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
Toulouse FC v Stade Rennais	16:00
beIN SPORTS	
AS Monaco FC v Saint Etienne	18:00
beIN SPORTS	
Olympique Lyonnais v LOSC Lille	22:00
beIN SPORTS	

Organisers taken aback by demand for women's World Cup tickets

PARIS: Five weeks before the women's World Cup kicks off in France, and there is a hive of activity high up in the Montparnasse Tower, one of the tallest buildings in Paris. It is here, on the 49th floor and with an unobstructed view over the French capital, that tournament organisers are working to put everything in place for a month-from June 7 to July 7 — where women's football will be in the spotlight like never before.

And yet, the organisers admit that they have been caught out by the extent of the demand from foreign fans for tickets. "We didn't see it coming," says Erwan Le Prevost, head of the local organising committee.

While the opening match will be played at the Parc des Princes in Paris and both the semi-finals and the final will be staged in Lyon, in between matches will also be played in some of France's smaller provincial cities, from Nice on the Mediterranean coast to Valenciennes in the far north.

"We did not always choose big stadiums, because we didn't want any empty stadiums," Noel Le Graet, the president of the French Football Federation, admitted to AFP. Yet of the 1.3 million tickets put on sale for the 52 matches, at prices ranging from nine to 84 euros ($10-94), more than 720,000 have already been sold.

"We have already reached our objective in terms of ticket sales and now we are going beyond. The tickets for the semis, the final and the opening match sold out in 48 hours," said Le Graet, who is pleasantly surprised.

"We got the women's World Cup in 2015. When you get it, you tell yourself that you're going to have to find some stadiums and fill them. "At the beginning, possible host cities were not exactly showing each other out of the way to come forward. I was a bit scared about the Parc des Princes, but the opening match sold out in five minutes."

That game will see hosts France play South Korea as they set out in search of a first World Cup triumph. Seven games in total have sold out so far, including the Netherlands against Cameroon at the 25,000-seat Stade du Hainaut in Valenciennes on June 15.

That will include as many as 10,000 Dutch supporters travelling down through Belgium for the match.

While not every game will be a sell-out, organisers surely should not have been surprised by the degree of interest from France and around the world as the United States prepare to defend their crown on French soil. Attendances are on the rise all over. While a French record crowd of almost 26,000 saw Lyon beat Paris Saint-Germain recently, in England there is set to be a record crowd for a women's FA Cup final this weekend when more than 50,000 watch Manchester City face West Ham.

In March, a world record crowd for a women's club game of over 60,000 saw Atletico Madrid play Barcelona in Spain. Big crowds will be the norm throughout June and July too, but from the point of view of security the women's World Cup is far less of a headache than Euro 2016.

Three years ago, the men's European showpiece was overshadowed by terrorism fears as well as hooliganism, with English and Russian fans clashing in ugly scenes in Marseille. A different profile of supporter will be present this time. "It will be nearly 30 percent children in the stadiums, it will be very family friendly with all the good side of football," said Le Prevost. "There won't be an oppressive atmosphere like there often was during the Euro."— AFP

Arsenal bid to reverse slump as Brighton fight for survival

LONDON: Arsenal have one foot in the Europa League final but know they cannot afford the luxury of taking it easy in today's match against struggling Brighton as they chase a Premier League top-four berth.

Unai Emery's team have wobbled badly in the league in recent weeks, losing four out of their past five matches after putting themselves in a strong position. They are two points behind fourth-placed Chelsea with two matches remaining, the first at home to Brighton today and the second away to Burnley the following week.

But they still have two chances to reach next season's Champions League-by winning the Europa League or moving up a place from their current position of fifth in the Premier League. Arsenal lead Valencia 3-1 ahead after the first leg of their Europa League semi-final on Thursday.

Victory in that competition guarantees entry into the Champions League next season. Emery, who said reaching the Champions League again after an absence of two seasons is the club's "first objective", is aware that he is not in control of the situation.

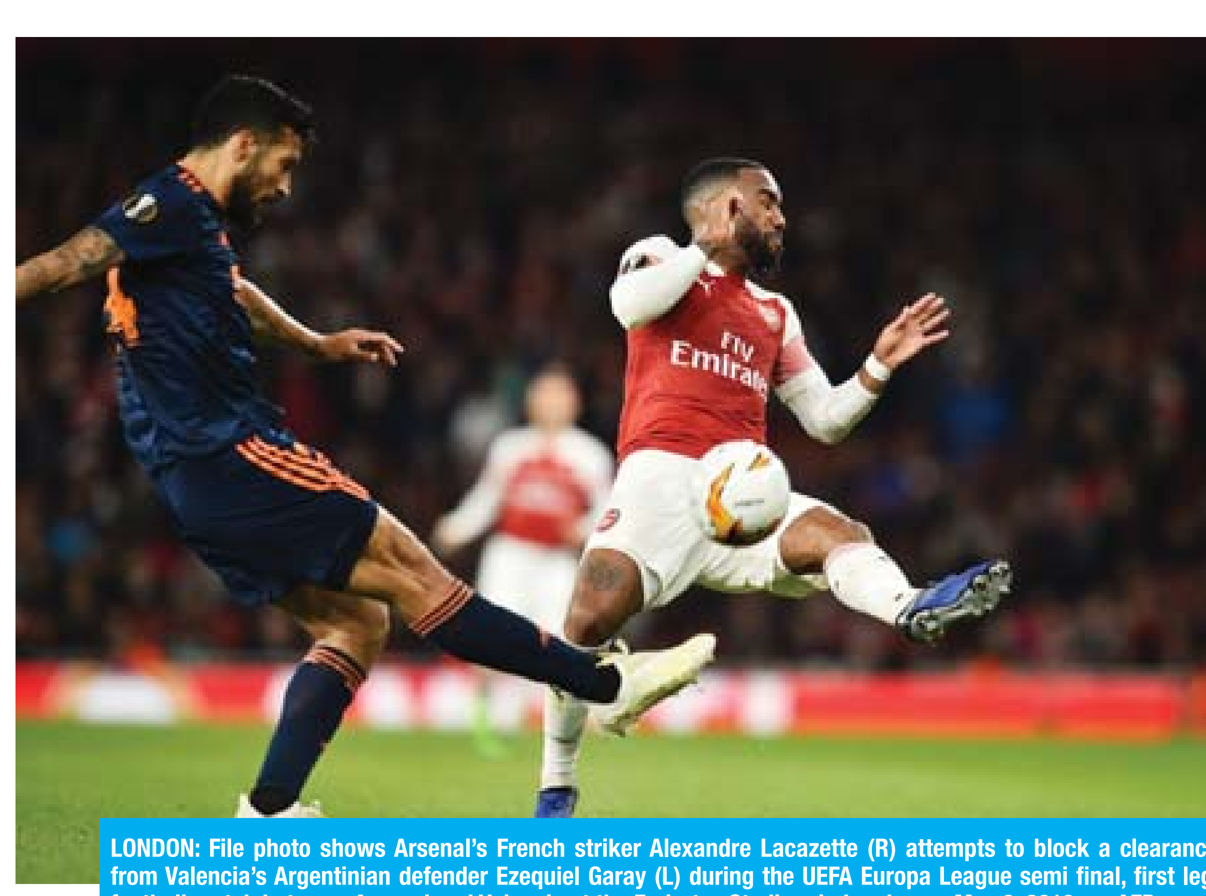
"We need to win the next match and if we win against Brighton we are going to the last match against Burnley with the possibility to be in the top four," he said. "It's not in our hands, but we need to win our matches and the first is today. It's not easy to win each match, for us and for other teams, but the focus for us is to win against Brighton for different situations.

"We are going to play the last match at home and we want to finish at the Emirates with a victory. "The first objective is to finish in the top four and it will give us the chance." Emery confirmed earlier this week that the injured Aaron Ramsey, leaving for Juventus at the end of the season, would not feature again for the club, while veteran goalkeeper Peter Cech is retiring.

The Arsenal boss conceded that qualifying for the Champions League through the league would be tough with third-placed Tottenham, Chelsea and Manchester United also in the mix.

But despite recent hiccups, he is happy with his first season in charge at the Emirates. "Our progress I think-when we started the season we lost against Man City and Chelsea and we worked for this process, little by little and at the end of the season now we are with this possibility. "I think when we started we would have been happy to have today these two opportunities in the Premier League and Europa League to reach our target." Brighton, who themselves have plenty to play for as they scramble to ensure Premier League survival, have drawn two of their past three matches.

They are on 35 points, four clear of Cardiff, who are in the third and final relegation spot. "We've shown a reaction to that slump in form, and hopefully we can continue that at the Emirates today," said striker Glenn Murray. — AFP

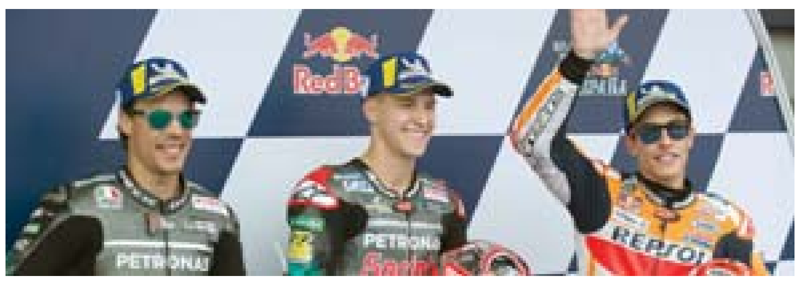


LONDON: File photo shows Arsenal's French striker Alexandre Lacazette (R) attempts to block a clearance from Valencia's Argentinian defender Ezequiel Garay (L) during the UEFA Europa League semi final, first leg, football match between Arsenal and Valencia at the Emirates Stadium in London on May 2, 2019. — AFP

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Nine-man Tottenham stunned

Fulham's Elliott becomes Premier League's youngest player



BOURNEMOUTH: Bournemouth's Dutch defender Nathan Ake (L) and Bournemouth's English defender Jack Simpson (R) vie with Tottenham Hotspur's Brazilian midfielder Lucas Moura during the English Premier League football match between Bournemouth and Tottenham Hotspur at the Vitality Stadium in Bournemouth yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino insisted yesterday that nine-man Tottenham won't let a "cruel" 1-0 defeat at Bournemouth ruin their bid to finish in the top four and reach the Champions League final, while Fulham's 16-year-old Harvey Elliott become the Premier League's youngest ever player in their 1-0 defeat to Wolves.

Tottenham's South Korea forward Son Heung-min was sent off for a needless push in the closing moments of the first half and Argentine defender Juan Foyth saw red for a studs-up lunge soon after the interval.

Pochettino's side looked like they would hold on for a point as the match entered stoppage-time, but Bournemouth defender Nathan Ake ended third-placed Tottenham's stubborn resistence to delay their attempt to guarantee a place in the top four.

A win at Dean Court would have achieved that aim, but fourth-placed Chelsea will now go above Spurs if they defeat Watford and Arsenal, currently fifth, will move to within one point of their north London rivals if they beat Brighton today.

"Of course it is difficult to get something positive. We made a massive effort," Pochettino said. "We need to move on. We have ahead two finals. It is in our hands. If it does not happen we will be proud because nobody expected Tottenham to be in the position they are today."

Tottenham's ninth defeat in their last 15 games in all competitions means they need to wait for today's results to see if they need to win their final Premier League game of the season at home to Everton on May 12.

It was the worst possible preparation for their bid to overturn a 1-0 deficit in the Champions League semi-final second leg at Ajax on Wednesday. "We are fighting six teams. It's impossible for all six to get the top four, whatever happens I will feel proud and whatever happens in the semi-final I will be proud," Pochettino said.

ELLIOTT MAKES HISTORY

In their first season back in the top-flight, Wolves moved a step closer to sealing an impressive seventh place finish as Leander Dendoncker saw off relegated Fulham. Belgian midfielder Dendoncker netted in the 75th minute at Molineux to give Wolves a third successive win.

Nuno Espirito Santo's team are four points clear of eighth placed Everton, who only have one game left, and six ahead of ninth placed Leicester, who have two matches remaining. If Manchester City win the FA Cup final against Watford later on May 18, the team which finishes seventh will go into the Europa League qualifying rounds next season.

In the 88th minute, Fulham provided an historic footnote as Elliott was sent on to become the Premier League's youngest ever player at 16 years and 30 days. English midfielder Elliott, born in April 2003, surpassed the previous record set by former Fulham player Matthew Briggs, aged just 16 years and 65 days in 2007.

London-born Elliott's only previous appearance for Fulham this season came in a League Cup win at Millwall in September. Marko Arnautovic ended his 11-game goal drought with a brace in West Ham's 3-0 win against Southampton at the London Stadium.

Arnautovic hadn't scored for Manuel Pellegrini's men since January 5, but the Austria forward fired mid-table West Ham ahead in the 16th minute with a clinical finish from Mark Noble's pass.

Arnautovic struck again in the 69th minute when he headed home after Arthur Masuaka's cross was palmed into the air by Southampton keeper Fraser Forster. Hammers defender Ryan Fredericks wrapped up the points in the 72nd minute with his first Premier League goal. — AFP

Atletico slump to biggest defeat against Espanyol

BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid fell to their heaviest league defeat of the season as they were crushed 3-0 by Espanyol yesterday, missing the chance to mathematically guarantee they finish second in La Liga ahead of neighbours Real Madrid.

Espanyol took the lead right before halftime when Atletico captain Diego Godin slid the ball into his own net as he scrambled to clear a cross from 20-year-old left back Adria Pedrosa, who had burst forward from his own area on the break.

The Catalans' top scorer Borja Iglesias doubled the home side's lead early in the second half as they again pounced on the counterattack after an Atletico give-away, with the striker calmly tucking the ball past Jan Oblak from inside the box.

Espanyol missed several chances to score again but Iglesias deepened Atletico's humiliation by converting from the penalty spot in the 89th minute and also completing his side's biggest league win of the campaign.

Atletico, who have now lost six times this season, are second in the standings on 74 points after 36 matches, nine behind champions Barcelona who play at Celta Vigo later on Saturday, and nine ahead of Real, who host Villarreal today.

Espanyol climbed up to eighth with 47 points. Atletico midfielder Koke fiercely criticised his side for their limp display, particularly in the second half. "This performance is not fitting of Atletico, this was not what we are about, We weren't ourselves at any point in the game," he told reporters.

"They were far better than us in the second half, they were superior in every aspect, you cannot explain it any other way. "The game was a real struggle for us, they played some great football and we had some good moments in the first half but didn't take advantage. We really lacked intensity in the second half and the way we conceded the second goal was awful." —Reuters



BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan defender Diego Godin (L) vies with Espanyol's Spanish forward Borja Iglesias during the Spanish league football match between RCD Espanyol and Club Atletico de Madrid at the RCDE Stadium in Cornella de Llobregat yesterday. — AFP